THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

JEHOVAH UNVEILED

BY A TRADESMAN

LONDON:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY R. CARLILE,
55, FLEET STREET.

1819

THE GOD OF THE JEWS;

OR,

Jehovah Unveiled:

BEING

THE CHARACTER OF

THE

JEWISH DEITY DELINEATED.

WITH

STRICTURES ON THE LIVES OF HEBREW SAINTS;

AND

Remarks on the Theocracy.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF LLANDAFF.

BY A TRADESMAN.

"If he be a God, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar." JUDGES vi. 31.

"Wise men are not profane when they deny the Gods of the common people, but they are profane when they think the Gods are such as the common people believe in." SAYING OF EPICURUS.

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PREFACE.

SUPERSTITION is one of the greatest evils that can afflict society; it instigates to the commission of every crime, and the practice of every vice. It paralizes the efforts and genius of a people, makes them slaves to tyrants, and dupes to the craft and fraud of impostors. It is a mortal enemy to truth, to science, and the enlargement of the human faculties. The best remedies for this dreadful malady are the cultivation of science and philosophy, discarding of prejudice and believing on trust, and a firm determination to examine for ourselves, and receive the truth in simplicity. It was these considerations that induced the author to examine the subject contained in the following work, the result of which he now takes the liberty of laying before the public. For his own information he ventured to examine writings which are said to be the oracles of truth, the fountain of wisdom, and an infallible rule of faith and manners. It is in them, say the priesthood, that a God of "*holiness, truth, justice, goodness*," is announced to mankind; it is in them that an infinitely wise, good, and omnipotent being is exhibited to our view; and it is in them that we see displayed all those attributes and perfections of Deity that are the object of our imitation.

Morality, the author considers "a science that has for its object the promotion of human happiness." It

must, therefore, be founded on the nature of man, his various relations in society, and the duties resulting from them. He has invariably found, that priests and their votaries have constantly endeavoured to withdraw it from this basis, and found it upon conformity to the will, and imitation of the conduct of an unknown being, whom they have taken the liberty to depict and dress up to suit their own peculiar interest. Their morality is essentially different from natural morality, or virtue; it consists in frivolous observances, idle and fantastic ceremonies; and not unfrequently in the commission of enormous crimes; but, above all, in a blind credulity and implicit faith. Men, conducting themselves by these principles, must then be governed by the caprice and selfishness of those who claim the right of expounding the will of the unknown Being, and they have ever had, and for ever will have, a separate interest from that of their fellow-men. The author has endeavoured to detect this quackery and expose the fraud. He has seized their park of artillery, and played it off on themselves. For this the ignorant and the interested, the bigot and the hypocrite, will most cordially join in loading him with abuse. But they are welcome, as he is very well convinced, that calumny is the *ratio ultima* of bigots when they have no power to persecute. Those who cannot reason are surely entitled to the privilege of scolding. *Blasphemer, Infidel, and Atheist*, are the best titles he has any reason to expect. But those who call God good and merciful, and then make him the author of cruelty and injustice; who call him the God of truth, and then father upon him innumerable lies; who make him immutable, and then represent him as continually

changing his mind; and who clothe him with inconsistent qualities and contradictory attributes; these are the true blasphemers. The author by exposing it means to do it away. If to discredit wild rhapsodies, inconsistent fables, and flat contradictions, be infidelity, then is he an infidel. Atheist is a term that has been most liberally applied to the wisest and best of men in all ages, and when he knows that such men as Tillotson and Locke have been branded with atheism by the fanatics of the times, it would ill become him to attempt repelling the charge. But if to strip nature or matter (which you please) of the powers and energies inherent in it, and inseparable from it, and place them in incomprehensible non-entities and metaphysical abstractions, be atheism, then theologians are real Atheists. He may, perhaps, also be accused of turning serious subjects into banter and ridicule. The weak have always been fond of crying up nonsense as sacred, and knaves chime in with them. He would further observe, that the prophet Elijah did not scruple to try Baal's divinity by the test of ridicule, and the adorers of Jehovah will not hesitate about the application of their own principles.

To the unprejudiced, and the friends of truth and free inquiry, the Author begs leave to appeal; by their judgment he will stand or fall. The candid he hopes will excuse the defects in this performance; want of a classical education, and the situation of a tradesman who can only write when he has finished the task of the day, he is conscious will require very liberal indulgence.

THE AUTHOR.

THE

GOD OF THE JEWS;

OR,

JEHOVAH UNVEILED,

&c.

MEN have always differed in their opinions about the origin of things, and the formation of the universe. Some give to it an author, an architect, and creator, who gave it existence by his power, and governs it by his wisdom. Others will have it to be self-existent, governed by laws eternal and immutable, and subsisting by energies inherent in its nature. The believers of a Deity are not agreed about the arguments which demonstrate his existence; those which one party lay the greatest stress upon, are viewed by the other as futile and inconclusive; nor are they more in unison respecting his nature and attributes. This difference of opinion is by no means confined to the vulgar, it subsists chiefly among men of learning and science: never did two of the most ignorant nations on earth differ more on this subject than that of the most learned theologians. It is but a very small part of the universe that we can see, and of that we know extremely little, no man having ever yet arrived at the knowledge of first principles; our notions of God can therefore be no otherwise right or wrong than as they tend to promote the welfare or obstruct the happiness of social life.

Whenever a particular divinity comes to be set up

and established in any country, the body of the people never put themselves to the trouble of inquiring into the proofs of his existence, or what is his nature and attributes. These things they believe upon the word of the priest and the legislator. The power, wisdom, and goodness of the God is then extolled to the skies; his protection and favour is most earnestly solicited, and his anger and resentment sincerely deprecated. It is his conduct that is to be copied, it is his character we are to imitate, and it is his will that is to regulate the actions of our lives. Whenever the will of an unknown being is made the standard by which the human race are to regulate their actions, it becomes of importance to know what it is, and through what channel it derives to us. The worshippers of the Jewish Deity will have him to be the Lord of the whole earth; it is from him they say that every good and perfect gift cometh; he gives rain and fruitful seasons, and turneth the hearts of man as he turneth the rivers of water. But who were these Jews? an ignorant and savage people. And how came it that they became the depositories of the knowledge and will of God? Of this they give us no proof but their own assertion. What reason have we to credit their assertion? We have no reason but the interest of a few, and the credulity of the many. Ten thousand times ten thousand volumes have been written to make that clear which is impenetrably dark, and to substantiate the "baseless fabric of a vision." Nature is the storehouse of human learning, and it is from that great reservoir that all the springs must be fed; the boundaries of nature are the limits of our knowledge, beyond these are the regions of chimeras and of dreams. If ever it fall to the lot of man to acquire any knowledge of God, it must be from nature, which no man can alter; not from books, which every body may interpolate, alter, and explain, as suits their interest or caprice. One thing we are sure of, that whenever the works which we see contradict the stories that books tell of God,

they are false. Can we ever hope to find the knowledge of God in a book? Where and how are the authors to procure information? Or can such a book be incorruptible and immutable, while nature is liable to change?

But setting aside these objections, we shall endeavour to draw the character of the Jewish God from the Bible only, which his votaries say is his own word. There, instead of a just and merciful God, the benevolent father of his children, the universal parent, and the rewarder of virtue and punisher of vice, we find a being cruel, unjust, angry, vindictive, and fluctuating. In short, a being made up of every bad passion, and the worst of human vices. The baneful effects that these representations of the Divinity have had upon the happiness of social life, have been too fatally evinced in instigating the ignorant and unthinking to deeds of bloodshed and horror, under the false pretext of being serviceable to God and religion. By these they have been inspired with a spirit of animosity and party rage, mutually hating each other; hence those numerous and destructive wars, on account of opinions and religious ceremonies, those horrid massacres and sanguinary executions which have so often stained the annals of ecclesiastical history. By these the benevolent and social affections are blasted, the milk of human kindness is dried up, and every thing that is worthy and good in our nature goes to decay; while the malevolent and evil passions are nourished and gather strength. It is a matter of indifference whether we pay our adorations to a Deity the work of men's hands, or the creature of their fancy; provided such worship tends to darken our understanding, enslave our minds, engender animosity, render men implacable, and outrage humanity. While the priests claim for themselves the best of the corn, the wine, and the oil, as the gift of their God, a tenth of the produce of cultivated nature by divine right, and the consequent slavery of the industrious part of mankind.

To investigate the character, and clear up the pretensions of this Deity to divine worship; to expose the absurdity and nullity of such pretensions, and point out the pernicious effects of imitating his conduct, or regulating our actions by his pretended law, shall be the business of this essay; and this solely from what is called his own word. This, however, is a task of no small difficulty, considering the disjointed manner in which it has come down to us; "his ways are not as our ways," so neither are his writings: we must, therefore, rest contented to wander through this holy chaos, and gather up the scattered fragments in the best manner we can.

To estimate the characters of mankind it is necessary to compare men with each other. But to what standard shall we appeal to estimate the character of fictitious beings, who exist no where but in the imagination of credulity? I know of none, unless we are to judge of them by their approximation to human perfection or imperfection. This Divinity says, he "made man in his own image," which, if he did not, then has man created him in his, and that, not one of the most rational and virtuous part of the species. Which of these is the case, it matters not; the relation is the same either way, and we are equally entitled to the right of investigating his character.

No character is so detestable among mankind as that of a cruel tyrant: at such a disposition every sensation revolts, and all our feelings stand appalled; yet do cruelty and inhumanity stand forward as the most prominent features in the character of this Deity.

The "Lord of Hosts," or the "God of Battles," is one of his favourite appellations among the Jews; he is always represented as assisting at their encounters, giving out the most bloody and vindictive orders, and as being delighted with carnage and massacre. The greatest blessings he usually promises are those of victory; and the greatest of evils he threatens that of being vanquished. All his saints partake of the same

temper, and the chief of them, who was "a man after his own heart," was a man of the most sanguinary cruelty. A few examples will better illustrate the savage disposition of this Deity, than any thing we can say.

We have a strong example of his ferocious cruelty in the 31st chapter of Numbers, where the Lord commanded Moses to avenge him of the Midianites; who selected twelve thousand men for this holy enterprise, with a priest at their head. This consecrated banditti accordingly proceeded on the expedition, "and they slew all the males," and "took all the women of Midian captives, with their little ones," burnt and plundered the whole country, and carried off the booty to their camp. Even this, however, was not enough to satiate the cruel temper of this incensed Deity; upon their arrival in the camp, "Moses was wroth with the officers of the host," because they saved all the women alive. He therefore, in the name of their God, issued the atrocious order to "kill every male among the little ones (although all the males were killed before, verse 7th) and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him;" but the maids they might retain for themselves, although it was on their account that the war commenced, verse 16. The girls, with the other plunder, the Lord ordered to be divided, according to his own holy law of robbing, in a way suitable to the character of the expedition. Taking care, however, to retain his share of the different articles, no less than ninety-six young wenches being his dividend of the maids. Here the elucidation of our priests is wanted to inform us whether the Lord kept them for his own use, or lent them to his priests? Or if it was for amorous purposes, or that of celibacy, they were ordered to be kept alive? No person is capable of reading this chapter, without being inspired with sentiments of the deepest horror at such abominable cruelty; no history can furnish a parallel by the greatest tyrant that ever lived. How-

ever, it is what a Christian Bishop calls "good policy combined with mercy!"

"The tender mercies of the wicked are cruelty," those of the Lord are little better: "he smote Egypt in his first born, for his mercy endureth for ever; and drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea, for his mercy endureth for ever;" or, as it is made to rhyme in some versions of the Psalms,

> "To him great kings who overthrew,
> For he hath mercy ever;
> Yea, famous kings in battle slew,
> For his grace faileth never."
>
> PSALM CXXXVI.

That "he who hath the hearts of all men in his hand" should manifest mercy and grace, by murder and carnage, is wholly irreconcilable to our feelings. Faith only can do this!

But who would expect that, after all the males were killed (some twice) and all the "women that had known man," and the young maidens slaves to the Israelites, that these same Midianites should not only exist, but be able to subject their conquerors to the most abject slavery for seven years? See Judges, chap. vi. These are strange things, if we had not the Lord's word for them!

In the 7th chapter of Deuteronomy, the Lord promises them the country of seven nations, greater and mightier than themselves, accompanied with the usual merciful order of extermination and cruelty: "And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them." They were encouraged in the execution of these righteous commands, with the assurance of the Lord's assistance, who is "a mighty God and terrible!" which he certainly was to the poor Canaanites. Nevertheless, the Lord was only to put them out by "little and little," without consuming them

at once, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them: at the same time they were to be destroyed with a "mighty destruction," verse 23. Such is the consistency of the Lord's orders, that, putting them out by little and little was to be accomplished by "saving alive nothing that breatheth," chap. xx. 6.

These were the rules of conduct which the Lord observed towards the Canaanites: next we shall see how he intended to behave to "those nations that were very far off," chap. xx. 10. When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself: and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee." This declaration may be considered as the Jewish God's law of nations, an example of which we have reduced to practice, Judges xviii. It is true, none of our modern writers on the law of nations have adopted his principles; such conduct is only practised by a few royal and imperial banditti. I doubt not but priests may declare these orders to be "the tender mercies of the Lord;" but, in my opinion, happy were those people who were "very far off" from such a God, and such neighbours.

It is disgusting to humanity to select any more of the sanguinary, exterminating commands of this Divinity, which his chosen people put in execution to the fullest extent. Joshua finished the work of carnage

which Moses began; his book contains little else than a recital of shocking barbarities, at which human nature revolts; and, to increase the horror we must feel at the recital of these scenes, they are all said to be done at the express command of God.

We must not here forget the inhuman barbarity exercised upon old Aaron by the Lord's orders. The poor old priest, notwithstanding his faults, was treated with uncommon severity. It appears from Deut. x. 6, that Aaron died, and was buried at Mosera, which we find, Numb. xxxiii. 30, was seven stages from Mount Hor; and might, for ought we know, take as many years to accomplish the journey. At Mount Hor, however, Aaron was ordered to die a second time, and was carried up to the top of the Mount by his brother Moses and his son Eleazer, there stripped of his sacred costume, where he died. But we do not read of the two worthies putting themselves to the trouble of burying the old priest a second time. We rather suspect that our modern priests would not be very fond of giving up the ghost on the top of the hills, even at the command of the Lord; it is likely they would rather choose to die in their beds, experiencing the kind attention of their friends and relatives. This conduct of the Lord to Aaron forms a striking contrast to the care and attention bestowed on his old horses by the benevolent Howard. We are at a loss to conceive why none of our theologians nor commentators have brought this story forward as a proof of the resurrection; a dogma which stands greatly in want of examples to support it. We expect their thanks for this hint.

Time, which mollifies the most obdurate and inflexible vengeance, had no effect upon the temper of this implacable Deity. He who can "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation," may as well do it to the fortieth or fiftieth. Accordingly, we find Saul receiving orders to destroy Amalek for what was conceived to be a crime

in their ancestors, viz. repelling the attacks of the Israelites, Numb. xiv. 45, four hundred years ago; and for which the Lord was to have war with Amalek from generation to generation," Lev. xvii. 16. "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass," 1. Sam. xv. 3. Human language is not adequate to the task of expressing, with sufficient detestation, our abhorrence of these commands; it must be left to the silent feelings of the heart. Saul executed his instructions in such a manner, as one should think was enough to satisfy the vengeance of the most vindictive tyrant that ever history held up to universal execration. But no! Saul saved "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and of the lambs," and spared the life of king Agag, for which solitary act of humanity "it repented the Lord that he had "made him king;" and he took his spirit from him, and sent an evil one in its place, chap. xvi. 14. If to the murder of Agag we add that of all those other kings who were previously killed by the Lord's orders, nobody can hesitate in declaring him to be the greatest regicide the world ever heard of.

Notwithstanding Saul "utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword," they were soon as strong and powerful as ever. We find them, at the time of Saul's death, strong enough to take Ziklag; but not according to the Lord's rules of war, or in the way his people take cities,[1] for, "they slew not any,

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[1] What is called the cause of God, has always been distinguished by peculiar enormities. "When the Christians took Jerusalem in the year 1099, every person within it, Christians excepted, were put to the sword, in a massacre that lasted several days, without distinction of age or sex. And some Christians, whom the Musselmen had allowed to live in the city, conducted the conquerors into caves and lurking places, where the mothers concealed themselves and their children; so that nothing escaped their fury." Now for the conduct

either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way," 1 Sam. xxx. 20. If the "Lord's ways were as our ways," we should not be easily reconciled to this story. To think of a whole people being utterly destroyed, and in a few years afterwards being capable of making inroads into the country of their destroyers, must give us pause: but faith can do every thing; so by the help of it we can swallow this absurd tale.

Every one who reads the Bible will be abundantly convinced, that many more similar examples of the cruel, blood-thirsty temper of this Deity might have been produced; but the foregoing may well suffice. From this prolific source of mischief has issued innumerable wars and massacres, crusades and expeditions of plunder and devastation. The Jewish history, and that of the Christian religion, too plainly bespeak its baneful influence. See also these atrocious proceedings faithfully copied by the Spaniards in their conquest of America. And was not the extermination of a great people one of the objects of the late coalition of despots against freedom? It is time to drop a subject at which humanity sickens.

The 13th chapter of Deuteronomy may well be considered as the *Magna Charta* of inquisitors. There the service of other gods, or, which is the same

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of infidels:—"When Saladin arrived at the gates of Jerusalem in 1187, which was no longer defensible, he granted to Lusignan's Queen a capitulation that far exceeded her hope; and permitted her to retire whithersoever she pleased to go. He exacted no ransom from the Greeks that lived in the city, and but a very moderate one from the Latins. When he made his entry into Jerusalem, many women came and prostrated themselves before him, begging off their husbands, children, or fathers, that were in his chains; and he set them all at liberty, with a generosity which had been altogether without example in that part of the world."—See Voltaire's History of the Crusades. How happy is it for mankind to fall under the dominion of those who have "the ferocity of their nature tempered by the benignity of the Christian religion!" Had the Amalekites or Saladin been engaged in the Lord's cause, they had acted differently.

thing, non-conformity to the established creed, was a crime for which they were to suffer a capital punishment. Freedom of inquiry was entirely prohibited; our dearest friends and relatives were to be sacrificed, without pity, and without remorse, at the altar of this intolerant Deity, if they should entice us (by arguments or otherwise) to serve other gods, of whatever country or kind, they were surely to be put to death. Not only were men to suffer for their own opinions, but whole cities were to be "utterly destroyed" for the opinions of "certain men." It is a thing unquestionably clear and evident, that truth requires not to be supported by force, fraud, and injustice. When we see the Lord's cause upheld by persecution and cruelty, we cannot be in suspense a moment concerning it: truth makes its way to the human heart by its own native energy, while fraud and imposture only want the assistance of fire and faggot. Who doth not see, in this chapter, the root whence hath sprung those innumerable and diabolical persecutions which have so often disgraced the history of Christianity? Here the features of the holy office are well delineated, as practised in those godly and Catholic countries, Spain and Portugal. In the 17th chapter we come to the very climax of iniquity, where mere indifference is made a capital crime, as those "that will not hearken unto the priest (that standeth there to minister before the Lord thy God) or unto the judge, even that man shall die."

Merciful and humane God! It is true, we do not read of any of these inhuman laws being put in execution until the time of the kings, notwithstanding their frequent relapses into idolatry. This may be owing to their stiff-neckedness. Under the regal government the toleration of opinions, or the worship of other gods, was the principal sin for which the Lord was continually denouncing judgments on the people, both of Israel and Judah. Those kings who were weak enough to turn persecutors at the instigation of the

priests and prophets, were sure of being extolled to the skies, as "doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord:" while, on the contrary, those who gave any countenance to religious freedom were continually "provoking the Lord to anger;" and such of the people as declined seeking him, "should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman," 2 Chron. xv. 13. The prophets, meanwhile, doing every thing in their power to instigate the people to acts of atrocity, *auto de fes* were celebrated whenever the power or opportunity occurred; and Baal's priests were frequently immolated at the shrine of the implacable Jehovah. See 1 Kings xviii. 40. The non-conformity to the Judaical rites appears to be the only crime for which the Lord brought such mischief on the people of Israel, and stirred up so many traitors and rebels to the government; all of whom, however, on getting into power, proved as bad as their predecessors.

Justice comprises the sum total of every moral quality; those, therefore, who ascribe moral perfections to this Being, must be sadly put to it to defend the character which he has given of himself in his word. His priests have declared him to be a God of "infinite justice;" what they mean by the expression I will not pretend to say; but if any thing like justice can be discovered in those actions and commands of his which we shall select, then are all our common notions of justice vague and delusive, and there remains not the slightest analogy between that of God and man. If we turn to Genesis xii. 14, we have there an account of Abram's practising a gross fraud upon Pharaoh, offering to play the pimp in the debauchery of his own wife; and a similar one on Abimelech, chap. x. In both instances, the Lord rewarded the deceitful, lying patriarch, and punished the deceived and credulous kings, as a proof of his infinite justice!

Another example of his justice we have in chap. xvii. 14. "And the uncircumcised man child, whose

flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people." To command infants to be murdered for what they could not perform, and a thing in itself of no consequence, may be divine justice, as it resembles nothing human! Could any thing be more horridly unjust than to bring such havoc and devastation on the people of Egypt for what was only the fault of the king? But how much more so, when it was not the king's fault, but the Lord's own? He continually hardened the heart of Pharaoh not to let the people go, Exod. iv. 21, vii. 3, ix. 12, and as often punished him for keeping them still; he likewise hardened the hearts of the Canaanites, "that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly." Josh. xi. 20. Is not this conduct like that of those tyrants who secretly foment disturbances among their subjects, that they may have a pretext for putting them under military execution and confiscating their property? Are we to consider the command, chap. iii. 22, to borrow the Egyptian property, without any intention of restoring it, as a proof of his justice and equity? This conduct is, indeed, conformable to one of his fundamental maxims of justice, viz. "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation," chap. xx. 5, which righteous and equitable maxim was applied to Korah and his family, Num. xvi. 32; to that of Achan, Josh. vii. 25; and to the descendants of Saul, 2 Sam. xxi.

These are, however, but trifling instances; if we turn to 1 Sam. vi. we shall there see a splendid example of divine justice. Upon the Philistines sending back the ark, "They of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it." But notwithstanding their joy, and their offering a sacrifice unto the Lord, "he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord; even he smote of the people fifty thousand and

threescore and ten men." A good round number of reapers in one valley! Pretty work this for looking into an old chest! How admirably is the punishment suited to the nature and degree of the offence? This unlucky ark brought a clown to his grave, for doing what one would think was a duty instead of a sin. "And when they came to Nachan's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it: And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." I do not think many people would be inclined to keep it from falling in the dirt, after hearing of this righteous dispensation. The Lord might have recollected the maxim, "to err is human; to forgive is divine."

We have many more luminous examples of his justice; among which is that shining one, 2 Sam. xxiv. 15, where "there died of the people, from Dan even to Beersheba, seventy thousand men." And for what were they killed? Why, because David took it into his head to count how many were of them; the only unexceptionable act of his life, and a thing in itself both just and necessary, and what had been done by his own orders formerly. See Num. i. 2. How the Lord behaved to his own people, even when he could find no fault with them, may be seen in the xlivth Psalm, verse 10. "Thou makest us turn back from the enemy: and they that hate us spoil for themselves. Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat: and hast scattered us among the heathen. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and doest not increase thy wealth by their price. Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. Thou makest us a by-word among the heathen: a shaking of the head among the people. My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me. For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth, by reason of

the enemy and avenger. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way."

What shameful conduct was it for the Lord to deliver over his servant Job into the hands of Satan, for him to work his mischievous pranks upon. The Lord says of Job, " there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." Job i. 8. Now we shall hear what this perfect and upright man, who was his servant, says of him. He tells us that " he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without a cause. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness." He is as destitute of humanity as he is of justice. For " if the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." Neither are there any means of bringing him to a sense of justice or equity, says Job, " he is not a man as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any day's man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." Chap. ix. So far is the Lord from administering impartial justice, that " the just upright man is laughed to scorn. The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly." Chap. xii.

This was the way he served his friends; how he treated his enemies we have seen elsewhere. It is by such actions as these that we denominate this being, a God of infinite justice!

Where we do not find justice we cannot expect veracity. The Jewish Deity has been pompously declared to be the " God of truth;" he says of himself, that " he is not a man that he should lie," Num. xxiii. 19, yet we shall find, in the sequel, that he will both lie himself, and instruct other people to do the same. We find him threatening Adam with immediate death if he eat of the tree of knowledge, (which,

by the bye, is a tree that every one should eat of,) Gen. ii. 17. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" yet he lived nine hundred and thirty years. He made a covenant with Abram, chap. xv. 18, in which he promised his seed the whole country from the Nile to the Euphrates! But, need any one be told they never had the half of it? In another bargain which he made with the same patriarch, chap. xvii. 8, "they were to have it for an everlasting possession." Yet where is the country that has so often changed masters, or ever held their independence by a more slippery tenure? He appeared to Jacob, chap. xlvi. 4, and directed him to go down into Egypt, saying, "I will surely bring thee up again;" this he never performed. He appeared also to Moses in the land of Midian, and instructed him to go to Pharaoh with a lie in his mouth, "And now let us go (we beseech thee) three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." Exod. iii. 18. This was a most senseless falsehood which he ordered to be told. What occasion could there be for fraud and deceit, when he intended to harden Pharaoh's heart against it, and to bring them up "by mighty wonders and a strong hand?" If he intended to do that, one would think this piece of duplicity superfluous; yet we find the injunction again repeated, chap. vii. 16.

He instructed the Israelites (under the same fraudulent pretext, no doubt, of sacrificing in the wilderness), to borrow of the Egyptians, "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold," chap. xi. 2. This advice they put in practice with great success, "so that they lent them such things as they required; and they spoiled the Egyptians." It is not to be supposed that the Lord's chosen people would be very scrupulous about obtaining the consent of the owners to any thing they had a fancy for. Perhaps the Lord had his share in what they got by fraud, as well as in what they took by force. See Num. xxxi. 37. The regard which this

Deity had to his oath, was no better than what he paid to his word, for we find upon some discontents prevailing in the Israelitish camp, Num. xiv. 30, occasioned by the disagreeable accounts of the spies, that he told them he would not perform that which he had sworn to do: "Doubtless ye shall not come into the land concerning which I sware, to make you dwell therein;" and in the 34th verse he tells them, "ye shall know my breach of promise." Nobody, indeed, places much dependence upon what people swear in a passion; and the Jewish God very often swore in wrath. See Deut. i. 34. Psalm cxv. 11.

We find him grossly deceiving the Israelites, in the quarrel that took place between them and the Benjamites, concerning their ill treatment of the Levite and his concubine, who lost forty thousand men, by trusting twice to his lying oracles, Judg. xx. 18, 23. It was by the Lord's orders that Samuel was to use the false pretence of a sacrifice, when he went to anoint David king, 1 Sam. xvi. 2. It is no unusual thing to cover treason and rebellion with religion! Not content with instructing people in the arts of falsehood and deceit, he sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and they dealt treacherously with Abimelech, Judg. ix. 23. Sometimes he causes people to hearken to bad advice, "to the intent that he may bring evil upon them!" 2 Sam. xviii. 5; 1 Kings x. 15. This need give us no surprise: do we not find the prophet Micah representing the Lord as holding a council, and concerting measures for the destruction of Ahab by falsehood and lies? Does he not approve of the advice of that spirit, who said, "and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets?" which upright counsel was immediately followed, "thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth and do so," 1 Kings xxii. 22. This is the being which priests term a God of uprightness and truth! But, to evince in the strongest manner, that there is no dependence either upon what he would say or swear, we find him

accused by his own prophets of falsehood and deceit, and as being the author of lies. Jeremiah exclaims, chap. iv. 10, "Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people, and Jerusalem; saying, ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul." And the prophet Isaiah affirms, he had caused "the people to err from his way," Isa. lxiii. 17. Jeremiah again cries out, in chap. xv. 18, "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" and in chap. xx. 7, he also bitterly complains of the deceitfulness of his God: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me." It would seem from this, that those who lived at the time, and upon the spot; those who had an opportunity of examining, had no such faith in the oracles of this Deity, as we have in our time. His prophets and their predictions were as much objects of ridicule then, as their illustrious successor, Mr. Brothers, is at present. Conscious of his prevaricating temper, he asks the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xii. 22, "Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision fails; tell them, therefore, thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease." How? By sticking to his word a little better than formerly, which he promises to do in the 22d verse: "There shall none of my words be prolonged any more; but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God." Here the reason of the proverb evidently appears: if he had kept his word before, he would not have occasion to say, "None of my words shall be prolonged any more;" the proverb would never have had an existence. In chap. xiv. 9, he candidly acknowledges that he is the deceiver and not the prophet: "And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet." This confession is pretty honest, one should imagine.

It may not perhaps be amiss, before we proceed farther, to hazard a few remarks on the character and behaviour of the prophets. It appears evident, from many places of the Bible, that these gentry used to officiate as conjurors, quack doctors, and fortune-tellers, for gratuities, upon various occasions. Saul and his servant consulted together what present to make Samuel for intelligence concerning the lost asses, 1 Sam. ix. 7, 8, and finding they had a quarter of a shekel of silver, or three-pence three farthings, they judged it very handsome acknowledgement.

Jeroboam, when he sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah, to enquire of him the issue of his son's distemper, did not forget to send along with her "ten loaves and cracknels, and a cruise of honey," 1 Kings xiv. 3. Benhadad, when he sent to enquire of Elisha, on a similar occasion, also took care to send the prophet forty camel load of the good things of Damascus, to procure a favourable response, 2 Kings viii. 9. And Naaman, when he came to be cured of his leprosy, brought no less than one thousand eight hundred and seventy-five pounds sterling in silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, with ten suits of clothes, 2 Kings v. 5. No bad trade prophesying at this rate!

We learn from Nehemiah, chap. vi. 12, 13, that prophets could be hired to prophesy any thing their employers pleased; and the prophet Micah assures us, that "the prophets divine for money," chap. iii. 11. They sometimes took it amiss if a customer were to go by them with his employ. See 2 Kings i. 2. The prophets were likewise divided into factions and parties; the factions of Judah and Israel used to prophesy lies against one another; examples of which we have in 1 Kings chap. xiii. and chap. xxii. and in 2 Kings iii. 13. Their cruelty is no less observable than their other qualities. Elijah slew four hundred and fifty of Baal's priests at one time, 1 Kings xviii. 40; at another, two companies of fifty men each, 2 Kings i. 10, 12. His successor, Elisha, got forty-two children torn in

pieces, for calling him bald pate, chap. ii. 24; and a nameless prophet had a man worried by a lion, for not giving him a box on the ear, 1 Kings xx. 36. It was to avenge a quarrel of the prophets that Elisha sent one of his pupils to anoint Jehu king of Israel; with instructions to murder the whole house of Ahab, 2 Kings ix. 6, 7. Let us hear the malevolent wishes of the prophet Jeremiah against those he looked upon as his enemies. "Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword: let their wives be bereaved of their children and be widows, and let their men be put to death, and let their young men be slain by the sword in battle." Jer. xviii. 20.

We have also some curious specimens of their pride and haughtiness, which deserve our notice. Nathan took it in high dudgeon that he was not invited to Adonijah's feast, and complains of the slight with great emphasis: "for me, even me, hath he not called." Elisha, notwithstanding the kindness and hospitality of the Shunamite lady, would not condescend to speak to her personally, even when in his presence, but ordered his servant to interrogate her, and return his answers. So proud and haughty was this prophet, that when Naaman, captain of the host of Assyria, came to his door in his chariot, he disdained to speak to him, but sent a messenger with his orders.

We have heard the prophets accusing the Lord of lying and deceit: we shall now hear what the Lord says of the prophets. It would seem that these inspirations of the prophets, which we have such a veneration for, were nothing more than the effect of drunken orgies and Bacchanalian revels, as the Lord expressly declares, Isaiah xxviii. 7, 8. "The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink: they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment: for all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean." It was the inspirations

of Bacchus that gave the prophets both utterance and impudence; for the Lord disclaims all connection with them, Jer. xiv. 14. "The prophets prophesy lies in my name; I sent them not, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart:" upon which account he cautions people to pay no attention to any thing they might say, chap. xxiii. 16, 21, 26. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord." He says, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they have prophesied." And again: "I have heard what the prophets said that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed."

In order to throw as much light as possible on this trade of prophesying, we shall produce two criterions by which we are to judge of prophets and prophecy. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known), and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams." Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3. Here signs and wonders are to be no test of the prophet's divine authority; it is the orthodoxy of the prophesy: but in the 18th chapter this test is reversed, and the credit of the prophet is to be established upon the fulfilment of the prophecy; verse 21, 22. "And if thou say in thine heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously." In the midst of these harmonious contradictions, it is no small consolation to reflect, that the Lord's

ambassadors make a very genteel livelihood out of them, as well as delight a number of vapour-fed fools. Blessed are the credulous, for they believe without examination! In our day the light of science hath so eclipsed that of prophecy, that we order the prophet to a mad-house, instead of sending for him to court.

We shall now proceed to consider a few of their prophetical predictions, and see whether the event corresponded with the prophecy or not, leaving it to the church to determine, whether the Lord deceived the prophets, or they, erring through strong drink, spoke lies in his name. The prophet Nathan was sent to tell David that his house and kingdom should be established for ever before him; that his throne should be established for ever, 2 Sam. xii. 16. This grant the Lord confirmed to David himself, Psal. lxxxix. 35, 36: "Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David: his seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah." Surely, if ever the Lord meant to keep his word with any one, it was with the man after his own heart, who was the model from which all future monarchs were to copy: yet we find David, in this very Psalm, making a complaint of his bad faith; "Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant; thou hast profaned his crown, by casting it to the ground," ver. 39.

It seems other people, who had no such faith in the promises of this Deity, did not fail to upbraid him with them; for he says, verse 50, "How do I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people." Rehoboam, David's grandson, however, had only one-sixth of these promises for his share. There are many examples of the Lord frittering his promises away to a mere nothing in the performance: the profane may, perhaps, suspect the Lord acts agreeably to the Machiavelian maxim, that "princes may safely break their word; for, if they but swear to perform

they will always find people credulous enough to believe them." This the Lord does not scruple to do. Accordingly we find him, in the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xxxiii. 17, 21, saying, "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel: neither shall the Priests, the Levites, want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. Thus saith the Lord, if you can break my covenant of the day, and the covenant of the night, that there shall not be day and night in their season: then may my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne."

This lying prophecy has been exposed to sufficient contempt by the Prince of the Jews, Richard Brothers, applying it to himself: let the church and him dispute who has the fairest claim. Neither the Lord nor the prophets, however, foresaw the destruction of the government and subjugation of the country by the Romans and other succeeding conquerors. The covenant of the day, and the covenant of the night, is rather a little better secured than that with David. The prophetess Huldah told king Josiah, he was "to be gathered to his grave in peace," 2 Kings xxii. 20. This prediction of dying in peace was rather unfortunate in the fulfilment; for, in warring with the king of Egypt, he was killed at Megiddo, and brought up dead to Jerusalem, chap. xxiii. 30. The Egyptian monarch proved a better prophet of the Lord than Huldah, who advised him not to engage in the quarrel, or the consequences would be fatal; which happened accordingly. See 2 Chron. xxxv. 20, 22. The prophet Jeremiah assured king Zedekiah from the Lord, that he should die in peace with the burnings of his fathers, the former kings that went before him, Jer. xxxiv. 4. However, being taken away prisoner by the king of Babylon, he saw his sons and the princes of the land slain before his eyes, which were then put out, himself put in chains, and kept prisoner

till his death; chap. iii. 10, 11. This is rather an odd manner of dying in peace!! The rhodomantade prophecies concerning the destruction of Egypt, Isa. xix. Jer. lxiii. Ezek. xxix. when the rivers were to be dried up, the fish destroyed, and the land desolate without man or beast, for forty years, we leave to prophecy-mongers to discover the fulfilment at their leisure.

It may, perhaps, be expected, that we should say something concerning the prophecies relating to the Messiah: but, as they are sacred, and the Jews and Christians not being agreed about them, we shall leave them to dispute the matter until his second coming.

To hold up a human character to general odium, it would be sufficient to enumerate among its bad qualities, a furious, angry, and revengeful disposition; yet though we find these to predominate in the Jewish Deity, in all the omnipotence of his character, we are still to account him a God, "slow to anger, and of great kindness; whose tender mercies are above all his other works," and one "whose mercy endureth for ever."

It is no easy matter to conceive how a man, far less a God, could be provoked at such silly trifles as this God of the Hebrews often was; sometimes for faults, of which himself is the author; commonly in circumstances that would rather excite sentiments of pity and compassion in a generous mind than those of anger and resentment. A few examples will illustrate this.

The affair of the golden calf put him in a terrible passion, if Moses had not been able to soothe him, by representing the indelible stain it would be upon his character to vent his anger upon his own chosen people in their present circumstances: "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great

power and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the wilderness, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swearest by thine ownself, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever," Exod. xxxii. 11, 13. These were the reasons "that the Lord repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." What this evil which the Lord thought to do and repented of was, we know not; but the evil which Moses ordered, and the Levites executed, was prodigiously enormous.

It was not long before his anger was again greatly kindled. Upon the people's murmuring about the manna, Num. xi. 10, he was very much displeased. It would seem the people had no great stomach for angels' food, it was rather heavenly; the flesh and fish of Egypt suited carnal appetites better, and was more to their liking, though at first it tasted like "wafers made with honey," Exod. xvi. 31, it was but light food for men in a desert: at this time the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. Upon this occasion Moses plied the Lord with a curious remonstrance upon the toil of the government, which so far mollified him, that he sent the people a month's diet of quails, accompanied with the tender mercy of choking great numbers of them.

Shortly after this he received another provocation. The people fell a murmuring against Moses and Aaron, upon hearing the disagreeable accounts of the spies, Num. xiv. 1. This cost Moses an oration similar to that of the golden calf affair; and "the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word;" so that storm blew over.

He next took a very odd whim: Balaam, the pro-

phet, having often been teazed by Balak to go and curse Israel, constantly refused, unless he should be at liberty to speak what the Lord should dictate, chap. xxii. 18. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver or gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." This ingenuous declaration induced the Lord to order Balaam to go with the men, if they should call him; but behold the caprice of this Deity! verse 21: "And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass. And God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him." How is it possible to please a God like this; who can be angry in the morning at what he himself ordered over-night? We could not expect such conduct in the ass on which the prophet rode.

He broke out in a terrible passion, which produced most tragical consequences in the matter of Baal-peor! Who would think that a man of Israel, having an amour with a Midianitish girl, could ever be the occasion of such horrid butchery, when Moses himself was married to a Midianite, and a people from whom they had received many favours? Yet for all this, "the Lord said unto Moses, take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And those that died of the plague were twenty-four thousand men," chap. xxv. 4, 9. This was rather a severe fit of anger! That they might know what risk they ran in case of misbehaviour, we have a long chapter full of curses and imprecations which the Lord denounces against those who vex him. He concludes in the true Hibernian style: "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold for bondmen and bondwomen unto your enemies, and no man shall buy you," Deut. xxviii. 68. To be sold without being bought, is somewhat dark, unless we are to

understand it as being mortgaged to some of his creditors. See Isa. l. 1.

In the time of the Judges, his anger was also hot against his people, "and he sold them into the hands of those that spoiled them," Judges ii. 24, 38. He grew more outrageous and capricious during the monarchy: "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, go number Israel and Judah." 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. We are not told what provocation he had received, but be what it would, it was fatal to the poor Israelites, for he sent an angel, who smote seventy thousand of them. Human sagacity is not able to conceive why such a vast number of people should be killed, because they had the misfortune to be numbered. We are as much at a loss to perceive the sin of numbering the people, which had been done several times before, by the Lord's command, and after this without any mischief.

It is not proposed to take notice of every angry fit the Lord took, that would be to transcribe the remaining part of the Jewish history: the kings of Judah and Israel were continually giving him provocation. Ahab is said to have done more to provoke the Lord to anger, than all the kings of Israel that went before him, 1 Kings xvi. 33. The 78th Psalm is wholly taken up with recounting the provocations he had received, and the passions he had been put into; these he bore for some time, being rather drowsy; but when they could not be any longer endured, "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man, that shouteth by reason of wine; and he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach:" verse 65, 66. It is no uncommon thing for drunkards and fools to behave in this manner!

The prophets are full of the overflowing bile of this choleric Deity, where he is continually venting his rage and threats against one people or another; denouncing war, mischief, and ruin, against whoever hap-

pens to be the objects of his vengeance; even his chosen covenanted people were by no means spared, but must take their share of his maledictions. The prophets give us very lively descriptions of his furious temper, not much in unison with the character of mercy and peace. What kind of temper must he be in, when he says, "My fury shall come up in my face: for in my jealousy, and in the fire of my wrath, have I spoken?" Ezek. xxxvi. 18. As to the method of melting people in the fire of his wrath, see chap. xv. 22.

The prophet Nahum begins his prophecy, by describing the passionate and revengeful temper of his God, chap. i. 2. "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries; and he reserveth wrath for his enemies."—"For by fire and by his sword shall the Lord plead with all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many." Isa. lxvi. 16. Behold the tiger-like ferocity of this Deity! "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion; as a leopard by the way will I observe them. I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion." The prophet Jeremiah says, "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places." Lam. iii. 10. Is it possible for human nature to conceive Deity, representing himself as a savage wild beast, devouring the human race? To what a condition hath superstition reduced human intellect!

Anger and passion are always succeeded by remorse and repentance, and those who are wrathful and furious are ever inconstant and fluctuating; it is to this cause we are to abscribe the repenting and changeable humour of the Hebrew Deity. If we are to credit his own word in Genesis, the greatest and most important of all his works (the creation of man) which himself had pronounced very good, he repented of, and it grieved him at the heart, chap. vi. 6. This is truly an

odd story! That God should make man "very good," and that afterwards he should repent of it, and be grieved at the heart. Why so? Did he not understand the nature of the materials he was working with? Was he an apprentice at the art of man making? If so, why did not some of the other gods he alludes to, chap. i. 26, 36, xxii. 11, 6, try their skill? This is the grand and primary blunder! Had he made man, so as to please himself upon trial, it would have saved him a world of provocations, and fits of anger; and spared him a variety of unsuccessful expedients for his reformation. It not only repented him that he had made man, but also beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. These he intended to have totally destroyed, had it not been for the persuasive eloquence of Noah, which made him forego that resolution, and save a breed of each species; which he got safely packed up in his ark, secure against the effects of that terrible deluge, which hath inundated human reason ever since. Noah did still more after the flood was gone; he put him in such good humour with the sweet smelling savour of a sacrifice, that he promised to drown the world no more, chap. viii. 21, although some time or other he may burn it to a cinder.

What could the matter be, that the Lord wanted to kill Moses "by the way in the inn?" He must surely have changed his mind very suddenly, as he had just appointed him captain and leader over his people Israel. This is a very dark affair, and wants much the elucidation of the priesthood.

At times, when he let the affairs of his people go a little behind-hand and run into disorder, he would repent, because of their groanings. See Judg. ii. 18. This repentance was, however, but of small service, though he stirred up several to set them to rights; yet being only the efforts of private individuals, they were but temporary expedients, productive of no great advantage. So little had the Jewish God of the spirit of discernment, that he often made choice of men to fill

public employments, and repented of it afterwards. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Saul, whom the Lord had taken great pains to select, as a proper person to be king over his people, and made him a present of another heart, 1 Sam. ix. 10, and "his Spirit," xi. 6. Yet, notwithstanding he was his choice, and one on whom he had bestowed such rare accomplishments, it was not long before he repented that he had made him king, chap. xvi. 9, 10, 35, and he took away his spirit from him, which he had so kindly lent, and sent an evil one in its place. Chap. xvi. 14. Was not this a notable exchange? I should be glad to know which of the two spirits influenced Saul when he declined the murder of king Agag? However, the spirit which the Lord took from Saul was given to "the man after his own heart," who did not stick at a murder. His choice of the Israelitish kings turned out no better; even those whom he sent his prophets expressly to anoint did not please him, but proved as bad as the other; so, whether he chose them, or the people, he equally repented of it.

The godly Hezekiah could not be sure of his favour for any long time. During a severe illness, the prophet Isaiah was sent with the consolatory message, that he "should die and not live;" and it was not until he had prayed, and reminded him of his good behaviour, that the Lord changed his mind, and ordered Isaiah back to tell him he was allowed to live fifteen years longer. See 2 Kings xx. The Lord, after trying various schemes for the amendment of these stiff-necked Jews, sometimes blessing, sometimes cursing them, he repented so often, that at last he turned "weary of repenting," Jer. xv. 6. Yet, after all, "he is not a man that he should repent," 1 Sam. xv. 29.

There are places in the Lord's word that would make us suspect that he is not so almighty as is pretended. The six days' work of the creation tired him, for "on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed,"

Exod. xxxi. 17. Thus, it appears, the Lord needs rest like other folks. If he has business of importance on hand it requires him to rise early. "And I spake unto you rising up early and speaking; I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets daily, rising up early and sending them." Jer. vii. 13, 25. It appears from Malachi ii. 17, that the Jews wearied him with their words. "Jacob by his strength had power with God." Hos. xii. 2, which was somewhat strange, if we believe him to be omnipotent.

If he was almighty, how is it that "he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron?" Judg. i. 19. Is almighty power not a match for iron chariots, especially after he had defeated the mountaineers? What could the matter be, that the angel of the Lord ordered to "curse bitterly the inhabitants of Meroz, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty?" chap. v. 23. Does infinite power stand in need of help? Or, is almighty strength not an overmatch for the mighty? Perhaps the Lord loved his ease, and wanted other people to fight his battles. The profane may suspect the Psalmist hints at something of this kind, when he says, Psal. lxxiv. 11, "Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? Pluck it out of thy bosom." I hope infidels will not imagine the Psalmist means to accuse the Lord of laziness! For all his mighty boasting of driving out the inhabitants of Canaan, and utterly destroying them, he could not effect it. In the time of the Judges, Jabin, their king, had nine hundred iron chariots; a good sign of power and strength. It is somewhat strange, to hear an all-powerful Being comparing himself to a moth, and to rottenness. Hos. v. 12. It would seem he was rather hard put to it, when he says, Amos ii. 13, "Behold I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." These things are not altogether in unison with omnipotence!

Neither is it possible for us to conceive, how the almighty, who is Lord of all, "who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth none," needeth to wheedle his people out of their property, and, like a needy adventurer, cozen the ignorant by magnificent promises of repayment. Although "the earth be the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," yet he complains of being robbed, Mal. iii. 8: "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings." For which he tells them, "Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." But despairing of terrifying them by a curse, he wishes to cozen them by saying, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now therewith, sayeth the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour ye out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Mal. iii. 8, 10. *Bravo!*

These are also texts to be found which make his omniscience a little doubtful. He does not appear to be altogether certain if the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah was so great as represented, for he says, Gen. xviii. 21, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according unto the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know[1]." See also Exod. ii. 25. It was not till after the "father of the faithful" had gone the length of sacrificing his son, that the Lord was thoroughly satisfied of his fidelity. Nor was it before the uplifted knife was reared to deprive Isaac of life, that the angel

[1] It was a pity the Lord did not come down of late, to see whether the wickedness of some modern Sodomites was altogether according to the cry of it that hath reached us. Some people will do that in the presence of an all-seeing God which a hint from the public prosecutor will make them fly the country for. The purest church on earth is happy in the possession of such worthy members; for, "where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound!"

called out of heaven, " Now I know that thou fearest God," chap. xxii. 12. I am inclined to think this was rather a severe trial of the patriarch's faith!

The manna was given to prove the Israelites, whether they would walk in his law or not, Exod. xvi. 4, which, it seems, he was not sure of, until he had proved them by this experiment, which was not successful, as they provoked him ten times, and fell a murmuring upon the return of the spies; before, he was determined that not one of all that generation should see the promised land, Num. xiv. 29. He was puzzled how to behave to those who had their holiday clothes on, for he tells the Israelites, " Put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." An all-wise Being had no occasion to strip people of their dress before he knew how to act! See Exod. xxxiii. 5. Hezekiah must be proved, for all his piety, in a very delicate affair: " God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Other instances can be produced of the Lord doing things to try people; this shews he knows them by experience only, the same way as other people do, which says not a great deal for his all-seeing eye.

If the Lord be ignorant of men, he is more so of things. It was for fear that men should build a tower to reach to Heaven that made him confound their language; but he must have been confoundedly stupid to imagine men could ever reach heaven by a tower. Although that " heaven be God's throne, and the earth his footstool," and that " he sits in heaven," yet he has never told any one where it is situated. O, that he would tell us its latitude and longitude, and discover it as clearly as Columbus did America, to our modern saints, who are on the road to it in droves; this would be satisfactory information! As for the ancient Jews he never promised them heaven, so they did not care where it was.

Neither are there wanting some untoward texts,

which are not quite so favourable to his omnipresence as could be wished, which represent him rather as a kind of local divinity than one extended to every part of space. In Genesis i. 26, iii. 5, xxii. 9, 7, he classes himself in company with other gods, and designs himself the God of particular persons, chap. xxiv. 12, and places. Deut. xxxiii. 26, his own captain, Jephtha, did not scruple to admit of other gods than his own; his words are remarkable; concluding his remonstrance to the king of the Ammonites, he asks, "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess? So, whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess." That is, we do not deny the authority of thy God; therefore do not refuse to admit that of ours. The Jews talked of their God as children do of their dolls: "Yours are very pretty, but ours are far better:"—"Great is our God above all gods." Who can believe in the ubiquity of a being talking out of a bush, Exod. iii. 4, or on the top of a mountain, chap. xix. 20; who had been seen and spoken to by Moses face to face, Exod. xxxiii. 11; as well as by the whole people, Num. xiv. 14. Deut. v. 4; who had human parts as well as human passions, who had a marquee in the wilderness, and a temple when they were settled to reside in. The prophet Jonah, not liking to go on a message to Nineveh, fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord; which is no great proof of his being a staunch believer in his omnipresence. Those who can see the God of universal nature in this being, must have more faith and less reason than a wise man would choose to be possessed of.

It just remains for us to make a few remarks on the Lord's character as a writer, which shall be done in as concise a manner as possible. Had the same being who created the world wrote the history of its creation, he would never have talked of the light before the sun was made, with two great lights, the one to rule the

day, and the other the night; as there is only one light whose presence constitutes day, and its absence makes night. Before science had outshone revelation, none were allowed to contradict these stories, on pain of being roasted alive; since that period the priesthood have been obliged to shift their ground. They now call this miserable nonsense, " Divine wisdom accommodating itself to the language of men."

Neither would he have spoken of a firmament, with waters either above or below it, when there is no firmament in existence. The Lord must be grossly ignorant of physics, to relate the history of the deluge in the way he has done: a modern chymist would have instructed him better in the production of rain, " than breaking up the fountains of the great deep, or opening the windows of heaven," which are no where to be found. The author of this history has not sense enough to see, that making the waters to cover the highest mountains fifteen cubits, increases the earth's magnitude far beyond its present bulk, alters its orbit, &c. but it is impossible such an event ever did or even can take place. This will satisfy both the infidel and the believer; as the one will give no credit to the story, while the other will swallow it with the greater alacrity. It was not he, surely, which fashioneth us in the womb, who tells the story of the scarlet thread at the birth of Tamar's two sons, Gen. xxxviii. 27, which, for stupid ignorance and beastly obscenity, is without a parallel.

The former part of this story shews us, that saints were not ashamed of bargaining with girls on the highway in open day, and performing certain nameless rites, which modern manners enjoin us to throw a veil over.

As little would any person, endued with the smallest portion of common sense, suppose the parents of a girl to be keepers of the tokens of her virginity, or that such ware could be handed about and made a show of. Deut. xxii. 13, 20. The magistrates of our

cities would have a fine time of it, if clothes of the nature alluded to were to be spread before them. If the profane were to write such stuff, they would, very properly, be reckoned insane; but coming from the pen of an inspired writer, then it rises into divinity, sublimity, and infallible truth.

The Lord is by no means an observer of the laws of probability in his writings: inconsistencies and absurdities swarm through the whole; which is another proof of their divine original. In Gen. i. 27, "God created man in his own image, male and female, created he them." This he forgets having performed, and Adam is much distressed for want of a partner, and the Lord is obliged to take one of his ribs and make one of it, chap. ii. 22. Is it any way likely that two men, Simeon and Levi, should be able to take and destroy a whole city, and kill all the males? chap. xxxiv. 25. Who can believe the prodigious increase of the Israelites while slaves to the Egyptians? Experience teaches a different lesson in our day, when so many unhappy Africans are required annually to supply the waste of our West India colonies.—But I am apt to think there must have been a vast difference between Egyptian bondage and Negro slavery. The Jews we know wanted often to return to "the flesh pots" of Egypt, but we never heard of a Negro who regretted leaving the herrings and yams of a planter.

Will any person credit the account of massacreing so many people by the Levites, Exod. xxxii. 28. The Jews were rather stiff-necked to suffer such wanton butchery. This story, however, has its equal in the Christian romance of the Theban legion. The profane are somewhat astonished to find the princes of Israel offering large quantities of "fine flour mingled with oil," at the dedication of the tabernacle, Numb. vii. in a desert where no corn grew, where the Lord was obliged to rain bread from heaven to keep them alive: neither had they any for many years after, and yet be

in want of flesh, when they had "flocks and herds, even much cattle." See Josh. ii. 12. This is a very consistent story! It is no less wonderful to conceive how they could erect such a magnificent tabernacle, adorned with carving and embroidery, by artists who had only learnt the trade of brick making; with a service of plate worth more than half a million sterling, Exod. xxviii. such as we could only expect in the cities of Paris or London. To do this in the midst of a wilderness, wanting bread, where the Lord was obliged to keep the clothes on their backs, and the shoes on their feet, Deut. xxix. 5, gives those who are a little sceptically inclined some ground for suspicion.

Who can endure to hear the Lord boasting that he had "kept him (Israel) as the apple of his eye," Deut. xxxiii. 10; when he had slain such prodigious numbers of them, and utterly destroyed the whole generation?

The history of Samson's exploits is liable to great objections, allowing his prodigious strength; the tale of the foxes and firebrands is so absurd, as to put even inspiration itself, one would think, to the blush. The architecture of a temple, standing upon two pillars, which a man could pull down with his hands, and lay the whole edifice in ruins, is so inconceivable, that the grace of faith alone can enable us to do it.

The account of David's introduction to the court of Saul, as related 1 Sam. xvi. 16, is totally inconsistent with the other, chap. xvii. The stubborn difference between the two is so striking, that they refuse to assimilate, after all the finesse of theological twisting have been employed upon them. The different accounts of the death of Saul, 1 Sam. xxxi. and 2 Sam. i. 2, is no less distressing; without faith little credit could be attached to either. The fertility of Absalom's head is very wonderful, four pounds thirteen ounces of hair was a pretty tolerable crop in a year. This shews the extreme fertility of revelation above nature.

The prodigious magnificence of Solomon is beyond

all belief. How is it creditable that the prince of so small a country as Judea should be in possession of such enormous wealth; whose father had begun his fortune by heading a gang of banditti, and plundering a few strolling Arabs? Forty thousand stalls for horses were a great many in a country that reared only asses to fill them. But what outdoes all these tales, is telling us of seventy thousand labourers, eighty thousand quarriers and stone-cutters, and three thousand six hundred overseers, being employed seven years in building a house ninety feet long, thirty broad, and forty-five high. See 2 Chron. ii. 1, and 1 Kings vi. 38. Why surely the Lord had forgot himself a little when he wrote this account! To people living at this day, and witnessing the late war on the continent, who know with what extreme difficulty the greatest powers in Europe could bring armies of two and three hundred thousand men into the field, and that it was by an effort without a parallel, that the French Republic could muster a force of one million two hundred thousand men. Even faith itself will scarcely be able to persuade them, that two petty kings of Judah and Israel could bring into the field, one an army of four hundred thousand, and the other eight hundred thousand fighting men, where there were five hundred thousand killed in one battle, 2 Chron. xiii. 3. As little credit is to be attached to the killing one hundred and twenty thousand Midianites, Judges viii. 10, and one hundred thousand Syrians in one day, or a wall falling and burying twenty-seven thousand men in the rubbish, 1 Kings xx. 29, 30. Or that "Pekah, the son of Ramaliah, slew in Judah one hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men." 2 Chron. xxviii. 6; especially as it contradicts a celebrated prophecy of the Lord's. See Isaiah, chap. vii. It is wholly incredible, that "the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they

were all dead corpse," 2 Kings xix. 35. How Joash could be "stole from among the king's sons that were slain," is to us very surprising, when we are told of his being hid, and escaping the slaughter, 2 Chron. xxii. 11. It must be allowed that the Lord sometimes makes a bull!

These are only a few specimens of the sacred truths which might be collected from this divine book, as a sweet morsel for the elect, but a bitter one for infidelity to digest. Great is the mystery of ignorance, stupidity manifested in the belief of absurdities!

Those who hire themselves out to explain this holy book uniformly assert, that the Bible is an unerring rule of faith and manners, and the Westminster divines, in their Confession of Faith, have declared, that "God, by his singular care and providence, has kept them pure in all ages of the world." Which purity consists in being dark as Erebus, confused as chaos, and opposite as the poles. A modern Apologist, who has said as much as he possibly can in favour of the inspiration, has resigned the singular care and providence to the mercy of its detractors; while Bible critics of all ages give us abundant proofs of the alterations it must have undergone, both from pious fraud and holy ignorance. We shall at present drop these objections, as they are but gnats for believers to swallow, and proceed to observe a few of those divine contradictions, which render this book so peculiarly edifying to the godly.

The 11th chapter of Genesis makes Abram one hundred and thirty-five years of age when he left the country of Haran, the 12th chapter says he was only seventy-five. The Lord threatens to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation, Exod. xx. 5; xxxiv. 7; Num. xiv. 18; Deut. v. 9. This he flatly denies, Deut. xxiv. 16. 2 Chron. xxv. 4, and the whole 18th chapter of Ezekiel, is taken up in demonstrating the injustice of it. In Exodus xxxiii. 11, the Lord speaks to Moses

face to face, as a man speaks to his friend; in the 20th verse he could not see his face, for no man could see it and live. Num. xxvii. 13. Deut. xxxii. 49, the Lord ordered Moses to go up on Mount Abarim, and die there; Deut. xxxiv. 1, says it was on the top of Pisgah. As Moses died at two different places, it must also have been at different times. Aaron also died at Mosera, Deut. x. 6, and at Mount Hor, seven stations from the former place, Num. xxxiii. 30, 38; two strong proofs of a resurrection, most unfortunately overlooked by commentators. If we believe Joshua x. 36, it was him, and all Israel with him, that took Hebron and Debir; but if we are to credit chap. xv. 14, Jud. i. 10, these places were not taken for a long time after that.

In 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, the Lord moved David to number Israel and Judah, and the numbers were, the men of Israel eight hundred thousand, and of Judah five hundred thousand, for which he had the choice of seven years' famine, three months' war, or three days' pestilence; and the price he paid for Auranah's thrashing-floor is stated at fifty shekels of silver. 1 Chron. xxi. 1, says it was Satan who provoked David: the numbers here are the men of Israel one million one hundred thousand, those of Judah four hundred and seventy thousand; the time of the famine is dwindled away to three years, but the price of the thrashing-floor is advanced to six hundred shekels of gold. 1 Kings iv. 26, says, Solomon had forty thousand stalls for horses; 2 Chron. ix. 25, allows no more than four thousand. 1 Kings v. 11, says Solomon gave to Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat, and twenty measures of oil. 2 Chron. ii. 10, makes twenty thousand measures of wheat, twenty thousand of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand of oil. In 1 Kings vii. 14, the artificer, whom the king of Tyre sent to Solomon, was the son of a woman of the tribe of Naphtali; 2 Chron. ii. 14, says she was of the tribe of Dan. 1 Kings vii. 15, makes

the two pillars of the porch eighteen cubits; 2 Chron. iii. 15, makes them thirty-five. 1 Kings vii. 26, makes the brazen sea to contain two thousand baths; 2 Chron. iv. 5, says three thousand. 1 Kings xv. 2, says Abijah's mother was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom; the 10th verse of this chapter says she was the mother of Asa; 2 Chron. xi. 20, says Abijah's mother was Maachah, the daughter of Absalom, but chap. xiii. 2, says it was Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah, that was Abijah's mother. 1 Kings xv. 16, 32, says, "There was war between Baasha and Asa all their days;" now as Baasha began to reign in the third year of Asa, this war must have been during the ten years the land had quiet, 2 Chron. xiv. 1. But how are we surprised to find, that after the period of this ten years' quiet, it was not with Baasha, but with Zerah, the Ethiopian, who had an host of one million three hundred chariots, whom he attacked with five hundred and eighty thousand men, that he had war, verse 9. How immensely superior in point of numbers are revealed armies to those which the greatest powers could ever actually bring into the field. "And there was no more war until the five-and-thirtieth year of the reign of Asa," chap. xv. 19, when Baasha must have been dead nine years, according to 1 Kings xvi. 8. Nor was it until the six-and-thirtieth year of Asa that Baasha began to build Ramah (ten years after he was dead), which was surely no war; and we have no accounts of any other. When a revealed story is both contradictory and confused, it is a proof that inspiration has reached the acme.

2 Kings i. 17, says that Jehoram, the son of Ahab, began to reign in the second year of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; the third chapter says it was in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat; chap. viii. 16, is at variance with both these. Whoever will take the trouble to compare the chronologies of the kings of Judah and Israel, will find a sad mass of con-

fusion to clear up, and a great disagreement in the end; which no one can set right. 2 Kings viii. 26, says, Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; 2 Chron. xxii. 2, says forty-two; but his father Jehoram being only thirty-two years old when he began to reign, and having reigned only eight years, the son, at this rate, must be two years older than the father. Still further, all the sons of Jehoram were carried away by the Philistines and Arabians, 2 Chron. xxi. 17, save only Jehoahaz, the youngest. Chap. xxii. 1, says, that "the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians had slain all the eldest." It appears, however, from 2 Kings x. 12, that Jehu, king of Israel, put himself to the trouble of "slaying" them over again, regardless of their being carried away and slain before, and likewise their sons, although they had none. Ahaziah himself was also twice killed, once in Samaria, where he was slain and buried, 2 Chron. xxii. 8, 9, also at Megiddo, and buried at Jerusalem, 2 Kings ix. 27. Commentators have an easy way of reconciling matters. Jehoahaz and Ahaziah are the same person, and as for people being killed twice or thrice over in different places, it is quite common in revealed story. A mere *bagatelle*, which none but infidels would carp at.

2 Chron. xxi. 12, Elijah sent a writing to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; but according to 2 Kings ii. and iii. chapters, Elijah was taken up into heaven more than seven years before that, at least before the eighteenth of Jehoshaphat. When inspired writers tell us stories of this nature, we cannot hesitate a moment in giving them all due credit. To crown all the other contradictions, the Lord denies having any hand in the Mosaic institution of sacrifices, Jer. vii. 22. "For I spake not to your fathers, nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices:" Moses says the very reverse. The

very laws which Moses had from the month of the Lord are contradictory one of another; Lev. xviii. 16. and xx. 21, forbids the cohabiting with, or marrying a brother's wife; Deut. xxv. 5, commands it. Lev. xix. 34, enjoins equal justice to strangers as natives. "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Chap. xxv. 45, allows the enslaving of strangers and their children: "Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy (bondmen and bondmaids), and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land, and they shall be your possession." But we should never have done if we were to notice every contradiction that occurs in holy writ; we shall only observe, that it is writing in this manner that constitutes the divine harmony of Scripture, so much insisted on by the priesthood.

We shall now only take notice of the nature of that divine inspiration with which these writings were composed, an account of which we have in 2 Esdras, chap. xiv. "And the next day a voice called me, saying, Esdras, open thy mouth, and drink that I give thee to drink. Then opened I my mouth, and behold he reached me a full cup, which was full as it were with water, but the colour of it was like fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk of it, my heart uttered understanding, and wisdom grew in my breast, for my spirit strengthened my memory. And my mouth was opened, and shut no more. The Highest gave understanding unto five men, and they wrote the visions of the night that were told, which they knew not: and they sat forty days, and they wrote in the day, and at night they ate bread. As for me I spake in the day, and I held not my tongue by night. In forty days they wrote two hundred and four books. And it came to pass when the forty days were fulfilled, that the Highest spake, saying, The

first, that thou hast written, publish openly, that the worthy and unworthy may read it. But keep the seventy last, that thou mayest deliver them *only* to such as are wise among the people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the stream of knowledge: and I did so." We have already shewn the matter, and this is the manner of composing a divinely inspired book. Can any one then pretend that he ever saw any thing like it wrote by the pen of man!!!

STRICTURES

ON THE

LIVES OF THE JEWISH SAINTS.

THE old proverb says, "a man is known by the company he keeps;" I know no reason why the Lord may not be known in the same manner; with this view we offer the following sketches of the lives of some Jewish saints, to the consideration of the unprejudiced.

The father of the faithful, and stock of the holy seed, has a fair claim for priority on this list. Abram, the son of Terah, a Chaldean potter, lived with his father in Haran until his death, when the Lord called him away in the one hundred and thirty-fifth and seventy-fifth year of his age to a land "that he would shew him," which land was unfortunately under the pressure of a grievous famine by the time he arrived at it; this circumstance laid him under the necessity of taking a jaunt to Egypt, only a few hundred miles further on. I much question if it was altogether fair in the Lord to make the patriarch quit his home, where he was comfortably settled, for a place where he could not live for famine? It was in Egypt that Pharaoh took a liking for Sarai, who was "a very fair woman" at seventy-five; this amour Abram did not disdain to facilitate with a lie, and by it he got much wealth. At this time the patriarch had made no progress in the propagation of the holy seed; so that in

an interview which he had with the Lord in a dream, after he came back from Egypt, he told him, that unless he was peculiarly assisted, his steward must be heir of all he had. To prevent that, the Lord promised to do something for him, and he should have heirs of his own. This, however, not being very likely, considering his advanced age, required a grand act of faith to believe it, "which was counted to him for righteousness," which is the basis of the sublime doctrine of imputation, so highly extolled by the saints. It does not appear that Sarai considered this promise as applicable to her, when she gave her waiting-woman Hagar to the patriarch, to be an acting partner in the holy business. It was some time after the birth of Ishmael before the Lord told Sarai that she was to be the mother of the chosen people; but so little faith had she, that she laughed at it. During the time the holy seed was in embryo, the patriarch changed his quarters, "and sojourned in Gerar." Here again the charms of the lovely Sarai, at ninety, attracted the heart of Abimelech, king of the country, to whom Abram told the same story as to Pharaoh; but the Lord undeceived the king in a dream, and "also suffered him not to touch her;" so there was no harm done. This affair, however, cost Abimelech "sheep and oxen, and men servants, and women servants," touch or not, besides a thousand pieces of silver, before Abraham prayed; and the Lord healed Abimelech, and removed the mysterious padlock, which he had clapped on all the wombs in his house. After the birth of Isaac, Sarah conceived an antipathy at Ishmael, and desired Abraham to "cast him out," which he was not willing to do, until the Lord, out of the abundance of his tender mercy, advised him to comply with the desire of this cruel stepmother, Gen. xxi. 12. The compliance of Abraham was perhaps the reason why the Lord tried him with a frolic rather serious. The command to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice, was touching parental feelings in too tender a

point. Although this action of Abraham's has been loudly extolled by priests, I can see nothing in it but an outrage on every feeling of the heart, unworthy of a God to propose, or a saint to comply with.

The patriarch Isaac appears to have been a plain simple man, too credulous, and oftener the dupe than the deceiver; although he attempted a fraud upon Abimelech by denying his wife, in imitation of his father, yet he got nothing by it. Rebekah and Jacob both imposed on him in a very gross manner, and by the superstition in which he was bred, he did acts of injustice which his heart revolted at.

Jacob was always a tricky rogue. The word signifies a cheat. Esau told his father he was rightly named. Even before he was born, " he took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God," Hosea xii. 2; at the time of their birth he did the same, Gen. xxv. 26. These gambols are unknown in modern births, but who can doubt of them when they have the Lord to attest it? The bargain of his brother's birthright, which he got such a lumping penny worth of, was a very unfair transaction; and the way he procured his father's blessing by lies and deceit, (according to the advice of his mother), shews that the saints do not scruple to obtain their ends by any means. It must be owned, that the most of those whom the church has placed in heaven as saints, have been the greatest of villains on earth. For these tricks he was forced to go to the country of Padan-aram to his uncle Laban, who beat him at his own weapons, and put the wrong sister to bed to him on the wedding-night; this mistake was, however, easily rectified, as he had the other at the same rate of service. Thus the ptariarch had the two sisters for wives, and their two maids for concubines, which in our days would constitute the crimes of incest, polygamy, and adultery; all very necessary to form the charactér of a Jewish saint. The knavish scheme of the hazel rods, by which he got the best of Laban's

cattle, was no fair dealing; this trick has not, however, succeeded with any of our swindlers, the Lord not blessing them the same way as he did Jacob. These practices raised a jarring between him and his father-in-law, whose service he thought it prudent to leave, and he "stole away unawares," Rachel having first taken her father's gods along with her. Knowing his base conduct to Esau, upon his return he thought it best to pacify him with a present, which he dispatched beforehand, as he greatly feared Esau's resentment of his former knavery. The contrast between the characters of the two brothers is striking. Jacob all submission and dissimulation: Esau forgiving, open-hearted, and generous. Upon his settlement in Shechem, the young prince of the country fell in love with his daughter Dinah, with whom he had an amour, and wanted to marry her: this, however, not satisfying Jacob's sons, they had recourse to a scheme of black treachery, pretending the dishonour it would be to their family for their sister to marry one that was uncircumcised; they persuaded Hamor and Shechem to comply with the rite, whose example was followed by all the men of the city. While they were still sore, on the third day, Simeon and Levi fell upon them, and murdered all the males, made their wives and children prisoners, and robbed and plundered the whole town.

This action the patriarch regretted, as it would make him stink among the inhabitants of the country, who might fall upon them, and slay them, being few in number. I can see no reason for this fear; if two men could kill all the inhabitants of a city, the whole family could easily defend themselves against a few country people. It is to be observed, that it is this Levi that the Jewish Deity chose to be the father of his priesthood, in whose history this action will shine as a gem of the first water. In imitation of this holy example, Charlemagne ordered four thousand Saxons to be baptized, and then their throats to be cut. Blessed and glorious examples of Jewish and Chris-

tian piety! Of peace on earth, and good-will to men!

Joshua, the successor of Moses, was another great favourite of the Lord's, by whose assistance he utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Canaan; who, nevertheless, still continued to live, and to be thorns in the side of his people. He had the address to level the walls of Jericho by the blowing of rams' horns, and took the city by mere noise; which it is well he did, for it does not appear he had courage or capacity to take it in the common method. An army of six hundred thousand men must have been the greatest cowards on earth, whose "hearts melted and became as water," for the loss of thirty-six men, (the number that fell before Ai) and their general a mere Bobadil, to tear his clothes, and make such a whining prayer as Joshua did, for so trifling a loss. The Lord upbraided Joshua for this piece of meanness, and told him to get up and act like a man, and not lie with his face in the dirt like a pitiful poltron.

The splendid miracle[1] of stopping the course of the

[1] Miracles are of two kinds: knock-down miracles, and probative miracles. The knock-down miracles are those which the Lord employs to kill people at once; such as the drowning of the Old World; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from Heaven; and this of stopping the course of the sun and moon, to afford the Jews light to kill the Canaanites. The probative miracles are those where wonder passes for argument, and astonishment serves for demonstration. The probative miracle in theology is the same as an experiment in natural philosophy; it is the miracle itself that is the proof of the doctrine, not the history of a miracle, which are two very different things. We know well enough that there are thousands of falsehoods told and written every day, but we never see one miracle; if then we were to allow the history of a miracle as much weight as the miracle itself, we would risk a million of chances to one, that we were only proving one falsehood by another. In theology, therefore, the miracle must always be repeated, or the doctrine can never be proved; as in philosophy, the experiment must always be performed, or the conclusion can never be made good, nor the pupil instructed. If "God's ways be all equal," he can never give one the evidence of a miracle for his conviction, and allow another no more but only a story about one.

I strongly suspect that it is infidelity and want of faith that pre-

sun and moon, sticking one on the top of a hill, and making the other shine in the valley, was a very extraordinary achievement. The priesthood have of late fallen out about this miracle, one party thinking it much too bulky for even faith itself to swallow, would rather convert it into a bad poetic fiction, while the other adhere tenaciously to the truth of the fact; which last opinion we would rather choose to follow. To stop the course of these immense globes, and unhinge all nature, for the purpose of giving a little longer light to a Jewish brigand and his banditti to rob and plunder the defenceless people of Canaan, is so consistent with infinite goodness and mercy, that none but the most hardened infidels doubt it. However, if the sun was made to stand still upon Gibeon, I can see no reason why the moon might not have been suffered to go about her business, the light of the sun being generally sufficient for all our occasions. I apprehend that it was not our present sun and moon that were thus stopped, but a pair the Lord had lent Joshua for the occasion. I hope that commentators will adopt this explication, which will save them much trouble when they come to manufacture this passage in future.

The Lord has many times helped the fair sex at a dead lift. Ladies who could not be made pregnant by hu-

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vents the repetition of miracles in our times. We know very well that every true believer can cast out devils, speak all languages without having learnt any, take up serpents, drink any deadly thing without hurt, lay hands on the sick and recover them. These are the very signs and criteria which follow them that believe, so that nothing can be more common, if it were not either carelessness or want of faith. The saints of old were perfect adepts at the working of miracles; Elijah could rain fire from Heaven whenever he pleased, the same as if he had a Mount Etna of his own in the air; others had bears and lions, as ready to worry those that affronted them as if they had been driving a caravan of wild beasts. As for a whale gobbling up a prophet, and keeping him a day or two in his belly, it is a mere trifle of a miracle.

man means, have been happily favoured, after duly seeking the Lord; of which number was the mother of Samuel. It seems the Lord, for some unknown reason, had shut up her womb; this circumstance so grievously afflicted the good woman, that she was continually in tears about it; until, by an extraordinary fit of devotion, she got so far into his good graces, that "Elkanah knew his wife, and the Lord remembered her;" by this means the great prophet Samuel was begot. The Lord's method of opening and shutting wombs would be a curious subject for commentators to clear up.

Samuel was from his infancy initiated in all the mysteries of the priesthood, and commenced prophet at a very early age. The first time we hear of him acting as a magistrate, is when he judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh; the Philistines, taking advantage of this assemblage, attacked them; but Samuel, by offering a sacrifice, and crying unto the Lord, procured a great thunder-storm to be sent upon them, which put them entirely to the route. "And they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." Yet we find them in the land many times after this, even in the days of Samuel. See 1 Sam. xiii. We are told chap. vii. 15, "that Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life;" we are also assured, chap. viii. "When Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel." And they were deposed from their office, and a monarchy established, because they "turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." Besides, it doth not appear that Samuel was an old man when Saul was made king, as he lived during the most of that prince's reign.

These seeming contradictions have proved a stumbling block to those who trust to the light of carnal reason, to guide them in their scriptural researches; but it is to be observed, that a thing may be false in philosophy and yet a divine truth. If it were affirmed,

that two and two make four, and at the same time do not make four; that a thing can be and not be, at the same time; that the whole is greater than a part, and that a part is as great as the whole; these propositions would be contradictions in science; but if they were revealed in an infallible book, they would then be no longer real, but only seeming contradictions. This is the most approved method that commentators have yet discovered of answering infidels.

Whatever might be the manner of Samuel's judging, or the nature of his prophetic powers, he has proved no bad prophet of the manner of a king, chap. viii. as every one who has the happiness to live under the government of those blessings to society will most readily allow. Samuel, though he judged Israel, and went a circuit, to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh, yet it doth not appear he was known for any more than a simple man of God in the land of Zuph, who would give intelligence concerning stray cattle for small gratuities. It was at a feast in this place that Samuel discovered Saul to be a proper person for being a king; at least the Lord told Samuel so, in the ear, a day before; and it is very likely that Samuel, who wanted to judge Israel in reality all the days of his life, thought Saul a fit person on whom to confer the mock shew of royalty, and humour the populace.

Saul, however, disappointed both their expectations; for though the Lord "turned him into another man," and made him a present of another heart, and lent him his spirit, and also made him a prophet, chap. x. yet it was not long before Saul acted foolishly, and the Lord had to seek him a man after his own heart, chap. xiii. 13, and by his mercy to Agag, "it repented the Lord that he had made him king;" yet 1 Chron. x. 14, gives as the only reason for turning the kingdom to David, the affair of the witch of Endor. He therefore took his spirit from him, which he had so kindly lent, and sent him an evil one in its place. Chap. xvi. 14. To convince the people of the tender mercies of the

Lord, to shew the benevolent affections of priests and prophets, and that it was no more than a mock monarch he intended should reign, Samuel took and "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Samuel now came no more to see Saul, until the day of his death!" Nevertheless, he went privately to David and anointed him king, who turned out a better friend to priests and prophets than Saul. We hear very little of Samuel after this, but that he died, "and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran." A plain proof that Samuel was a promoter of the seditious and treasonable views of David.

The fate of poor Saul was very hard. The Philistines, his constant enemies, were now gathered together, and their force was such, that he "greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Chap. xxviii. 6, he was therefore under the necessity of having recourse to the witch of Endor. The Lord's other way of telling the story differs a little from this; it was because he asked "counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it, and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him," 1 Chron. x. 14. This difference is of small moment, although one place says he "enquired of the Lord," and the other, that he "enquired not of the Lord:" those who have faith can believe both with the utmost facility. The witch of Endor, by the assistance of her art, was successful in raising Samuel out of the earth, to give advice to Saul upon this trying occasion; but the information was of so unpleasant a nature, that Saul fainted, and became totally unfit for action. "When doctors differ, who shall decide?" Priests have fallen out about this story, one party will have it to be Satan, assuming the appearance of the prophet; the other, affirming it to be Samuel *in propria persona*; we must therefore leave it to the elect to believe which

of the ways they choose, or them both, if they be so inclined. It is to be observed, that it is Samuel himself who writes the story (according to the determination of the church) with many others of a similar stamp, equally amusing and diverting.

We come now to the very climax of saintship, to holy David, a king and a saint, and a man after God's own heart,[1] whose conduct we ought to be very cautious in scrutinizing, it being long held impeccable both by the Lord and the church, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite; which matter, as it is given up to the mercy of the profane by both, we shall say nothing, of not choosing to insult a fallen foe, or attack a defenceless post. The first of David's exploits in story is his killing of Goliah, the Philistine giant and champion, by a lucky blow with a stone. This we allow to be a very gallant and splendid achievement, for which he had the promise of the king's daughter to wife; but Saul being much chagrined at the applause bestowed by the women upon David's bravery, was rather tardy in the fulfilment of it. He therefore judged it best to put him upon his mettle, and required, as a farther qualification for the proposed honour, that he would bring him an hundred foreskins of the Philistines; this our hero gallantly performed, by bringing double the number in full tale. A curious and most extraordinary spectacle it must undoubtedly have been, to see the Royal Psalmist devoutly employed in flaying the fallen members of the dead Philistines, and gravely stringing them on a piece of packthread, to bind round his temples in form of a civic crown, or to wear them over his

[1] An English divine hath the following comment on this title of David:—"David was a man after God's own heart, not in holiness, that is not meant; for besides adultery, and murder, his many other sins, as cursing his enemies to the pit of Hell, is unaccountable: but after God's own heart is a Hebraism, and in English signifies as much as [a man for my turn.] He will kill and slay as the priest commands and directs."—Hickeringill on Priestcraft.

shoulder like a sash; thus accoutred to enter the royal presence, or to pay his devoirs to his mistress. This marriage, however, had not the desired effect of conciliating matters; for whatever was the cause, Saul was exasperated more and more against David, until he was obliged to fly the court.

It is to be recollected, that the prophet Samuel had privately anointed David as successor to the kingdom, previous to his appearance at court. Upon the breaking out of this rupture, David immediately set out to his old friend Samuel, at Naioth in Ramah, who was then busily employed in training the young prophets for service. Saul sent messengers to apprehend David, who were immediately seized with the *mania* of prophesying until he came himself, when the disorder infected him so violently, that he stript off his clothes, and prophesied naked a night and a day.

We have no clue to unravel the nature of prophesyings; the Lord has left them in utter darkness, that priests may find employment in guessing what they might be about. Inspiration proceeds by fits and starts, and by no means is tied down to the rules of composition. The Pythia of Delphos, and the Urim and Thummim of Judea, spoke equally dark and unintelligible enigmas. After this, David, being alone, and also in company with young men, called at Nob to see his friend Ahimelech the priest, and get some provision, who consented to give him the consecrated bread, provided the young men had at least kept themselves from women, when it happily turned out that they had abstained for three days. The priests of Nob, however, paid dear for their hospitality. David now wandered up and down the country with a band of 600 vagrants and malcontents at his heels, collecting provisions from the country people; or to use a Scots law-phrase, "went a sorning," sending young men with a polite message, and a deal of compliments, giving at the same time a broad hint, if refused his demands, he

would "smite every one that pissed against the wall," by next morning.

This was the way he served Nabal the Carmelite, who being a country clown, gave his young men a very indifferent reception; which so incensed David, that he and his band were on the road to pay Nabal a very unwelcome visit, had not his wife met him with a handsome present, being informed of his intentions by one of the young men: this mollified our incensed hero, so that he received the present, and also "accepted her person!" When Abigail returned home, she found Nabal in his cups, so did not think proper to inform him of what passed between her and David that night; but next morning, by what she told him, and what he probably guessed, "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." Ten days after this the Lord smote the churlish clown, and he died, to the mutual content of holy David and Mrs. Abigail, who, no doubt, thanked the Lord for his great kindness!

David's affairs turning critical, he thought it prudent to emigrate to Gath, and put himself under the protection of Achish, who gave him Ziglag for an asylum; where, instead of cultivating the arts of peace, and attending to country affairs, his trade was to rob and murder the Geshurites, the Gezerites, and the Amalekites, pretending to Achish he was making inroads into his own country; for, "he saved neither man nor woman alive to bring tidings to Gath." Murder, robbery, and falsehood, make but a small speck in the character of a saint, who is "a man after God's own heart;" could the priesthood fix crimes like these on Atheists or Infidels, they would then be termed the greatest of human atrocities, but when acted within the pale of the church, it is an infallible sign of grace, for "where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound."

The war which broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites gave David a fresh opportunity of

displaying his saint-like behaviour, who offered himself as a volunteer to go and fight against his country: but the other Philistine chiefs, having no such confidence in him as Achish, refused to accept the services of so dangerous an ally. He was forced to turn back, 1 Sam. xxix. David's hypocrisy was equal to his other holy qualities; upon the defeat of the Israelitish army, and the death of Saul and his sons in battle, he pretended the deepest sorrow, and no less than composed an elegy for them. David now changed his plan of operations, "he enquired of the Lord, saying, shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? and the Lord said unto him, Go up;" when by stratagems of one kind or other he got himself anointed king of Judah. During his reign over Judah, which was seven years and six months, a civil war was carried on between the two houses of Saul and David; but "the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker," until two villains, by a grand act of treason, murdered Ishbosheth, which put an end to the contest.

David now arrived at the zenith of power. He was anointed king over all Israel in Hebron, by the elders of the people. He was not long settled in the government, when he "gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand," to bring up the ark of the Lord from Kirjath-jearim, besides a goodly company of priests and fiddlers. David thought, no doubt, by this splendid show to impress the people with sentiments of his extraordinary piety; an accident, however, discovered his true motives, which sufficiently unveils his hypocrisy to us. It happened that Uzzah, one of the drivers, took hold of the ark, to prevent its falling, as the oxen shook the cart. This action of Uzzah's, however, not pleasing the Lord, he smote him, "for his error; and there he died by the ark of God," 2 Sam. vi. 7. But 1 Chron. xv. 13, says, the reason of his smiting Uzzah was because the Levites did not carry it, as it was their duty

to have done.[1] It is no uncommon thing for the Lord to smite one person for another's fault; by which he proves himself a God of justice and equity. It is upon this sublime principle that Christianity is founded. David finding that there was smiting going on, grew displeased, and being afraid of the Lord, determined not to carry it a foot further; he wheeled about, and left it at the house of Obed-edom, where it abode three months. "And it was told king David, saying, the Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertained unto him, because of the ark." Although David would have no concern with the ark, when there were smiting in the case, he no sooner heard there were blessings to be had by keeping it, than he flew with all speed, and took it from poor Obed-edom, who might have made his fortune, if he had been allowed to keep it a little longer. The carrying of it now was not entrusted to profane hands, but solely confided to the sanctified fingers of the Levites,

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[1] There is something singular in the history of the ark. The people of Bethshemesh, notwithstanding the joy they expressed when they first saw it, wanted to get rid of it as fast as possible. "And the men of Bethshemesh said, who is able to stand before this Holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us?" 1 Sam. vi. 20. Yes, after smiting 50,070 men, he and his ark might go where they pleased. They accordingly sent messengers to the men of Kirjath-jearim to come and fetch it away, which they did, where it lay neglected, without any one caring about it, 1 Chron. xiii. 3, for twenty years, according to 1 Sam. vii. 2; but as this transaction must have taken place previous to Saul's accession to the throne, and his reign was forty years, and David only brought it away after he ascended the throne of all Israel, it must have remained near fifty years in Kirjath-jearim. We see that the smiting of 50,070 men made the men of Bethshemesh call him Holy Lord God; and it is because the history is stuffed with blunders and contradictions, that we term it Holy Writ! When Solomon lodged the ark in the temple, all the precious ware it contained was only the two tables of stone, 1 Kings viii. 9. 1 Chron. v. 10, although Aaron had put up a pot of manna along with them. In St. Paul's time it contained a golden pot with manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, besides the two tables. Heb. ix. 4.

who brought it safe home without any further accident. David played a principal character in this second procession; he danced and leaped "before the Lord with all his might," in such indecent and obscene attitudes, uncovering himself "as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself," that he gave great offence to his wife Michal, who reproved him for such scandalous behaviour; but she might have spared herself the pains, for David told her "he would be more vile than thus, and base in his own sight: and of the maid-servants, whom she had spoken of, of them should he be had in honour." This story contains a beautiful picture of true religion, piety, and decency!

David, finding there were blessings to be got by the possession of the ark, thought it would be no bad scheme to build a house for the Lord; but, though he "was with him whithersoever he went," yet having "shed blood abundantly," he would not suffer him to build a house to his name. A piece of great inconsistency in the Lord, who is God of battles! and "who makes the fowls drunk with the blood of princes." David, however, drew out a plan of the building, and prepared vast materials; he also left Solomon one hundred thousand talents of gold, and one million talents of silver; 1 Chron. xxii. 14; besides this he gave, as a private donation, three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of silver; the princes of Israel also made a collection of five thousand talents and ten thousand drams of gold, and ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of brass, and one hundred thousand talents of iron, chap. xxix. 4, 7; amounting in the whole to seven hundred and eighty millions sterling. The Lord must undoubtedly have given David the most of this sum out of his inexhaustible treasure; it is not to be supposed, that robbing a few Gezerites, Geshurites, or Amalekites, could produce much money. There is not so much on the face of the earth; but the stories related in a divine

history must far exceed the bounds of credibility, or else they could have no attractions for faith.

David, when an exiled vagrant, used to subsist by robbery and murder; now that he is raised to the regal dignity, practises cruelty, and injustice by legal methods, and murders people by geometrical rules, and with mathematical precision. "And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground: even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive; and so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts," 2 Sam. ii. 2. Who could refuse presents to a prince of such unbounded clemency?

Unfortunately the number of those who hated him without a cause were more than the hairs of his head; and, poor man, he was sometimes forced to restore that which he took not away.[1] Psal. lxiv. 4.

David in warring with Hadadezer king of Zobah, took from him one thousand chariots, seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen; he houghed all the chariot horses, except so many as would serve for one hundred chariots, he likewise slew of the Syrians, who were the allies of Hadadezer, twenty-two thousand; at another smiting in the valley of Salt he slew eighteen thousand Syrians more, 2 Sam. chap. viii. At another time, (for the inspired historian disdains every thing that looks like chronology,) "David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen," chap. x. 18. The books of Chronicles differ in these articles, 1 Chron. xviii. 4, magnifies the number of horsemen taken from Hadadezer to seven thousand, and calls them eighteen thousand Edomites, whom Abishai slew in the valley of Salt; the Hebrew title of the lxth Psalm makes them

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[1] We are not able to comprehend how a person can "restore that which he took not away;" it is truly enigmatical.

only twelve thousand Edomites whom Joab slew; chap. xix. 18, calls them forty thousand footmen, whom David slew. A few jarrings in an infallible book establishes its divine original beyond a doubt, because the writers, according to the logic of the church, could not lie by consent!

Undoubtedly this is one of the best arguments the church is in possession of; nothing can be more obvious. That the God of truth, who knoweth all things, should inspire different writers, to tell the same story different ways, so as to contradict each other; and thus prevent all suspicion of lying. It is surprising that infidels should remain blind to the force of this argument.

David was now warmly employed in smiting and slaying his neighbours, although the Lord "had given him rest round about from all his enemies." When he took Rabbah, he was very ingenious at contriving new methods of torture for the unfortunate inhabitants. "And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon," 2 Sam. xii. 31. This conduct is entirely comformable to the character of those who are under the influence of the true religion. The tree is known by its fruit.

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, it is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites," 2 Sam. xxi. 1. If we were to judge of this history by the same rules that we judge of other histories, we might very possibly conclude, that this enquiring of the Lord, and the answer the Lord gave, was nothing more than a base juggle between the priests and David, in order to palliate the murder of Saul's innocent descendants. But, being under no such carnal obliga-

tions, we shall proceed upon the same divine principles as the history is wrote on.

It is a thing indubitably certain, that no man is chargeable with the actions of another, over whom he has no controul. For the Lord, therefore, to send a famine on the Israelites, in the days of David, for the actions of Saul, must be divine justice; because it is a direct violation of natural equity. The reasons that the Lord gives for sending this famine are something odd; viz. " for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." Now, if the Lord be an accurate historian, the house of David was much more bloody than that of Saul; the Lord even refused to let him build the temple, " because he had shed blood abundantly." As to Saul's slaying the Gibeonites, it is no where recorded by the Lord in his history; the next verse says, that he only " sought to slay them." We are also left to guess at what period of David's reign this famine took place; these omissions have given occasion to sceptics for starting a great many captious questions, which are happily unanswerable by human intellect. Obscurity and confusion are indispensibly requisite in a sacred history, to confound the ungodly in their profane researches into divine mystery, to destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent, as well as to give constant employment to priests and commentators; to obscure natural light by revealed darkness, and to make revealed darkness spiritually light; whose works, like the world, poised on nothing, are supported upon " the baseless fabric of a vision."

David, after having enquired of the Lord, consulted with the Gibeonites what he should do for them, who very modestly and humanely required seven of Saul's sons to be given them, to " hang up unto the Lord." This just demand David graciously complied with, and delivered unto them two sons of Rispah, and five sons of his own wife Michal, which she bare to Adriel

the Meholothite, her former husband, verse 8. The Lord forgets himself a little here, (but infinite wisdom making gross blunders is so common, that we think nothing of it.) It was Merab the eldest daughter that was married to Adriel. 1 Sam. xviii. 19. Michal, indeed, was taken from David and married to Phalti the son of Laish, chap. xxv. 44; but restored to him again, 2 Sam. iii. 15, 16; besides, she never had a child, chap. vi. 23. Seriously, if it were possible for ignorance and folly to blaspheme the Supreme Being, it were the highest degree of it to father such blunders and absurdities on omnipotence.

"And they hanged them in the hill before the Lord." It does not require a vast fund of sagacity to discover how the Gibeonites came to make this holy demand; we have only to recollect, that they were a kind of understrappers to the priesthood, and we know the connection that subsisted between holy David and that fraternity; this clue will unravel the whole mystery. "And after that God was entreated for the land." It is happy for our holy religion, that heathenism can boast of no such doings as these among their gods and heroes: if it could, infidels might bring them forward as proofs of the truth, justice, goodness, and holiness of their characters; in that case the church might be sorely puzzled to answer their arguments, being so very like her own.

David was also the sweet singer of Israel, and composed many godly ballads, and spiritual songs; some of which discover the character of the author very plainly. The cixth is an excellent model of holy cursing, while the xxxviiith most pathetically describes the nature of that distemper, which sometimes proves a disagreeable alloy to the loves of the saints. The elect have, however, taken this cytherean lament for a divine allegory on the spiritual distemper of souls; the same song suits equally the pain of a venereal ulcer, and the pangs of the new birth; so accommodating is inspiration to the ideas of the vulgar.

" Now the days of David drew nigh, that he should die;" but as he " did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite," he had no occasion of repenting that he " had shed blood abundantly:" or of forgiving his enemies: actions, which we sometimes find even saints performing at their death. He was not one of the unhappy virtuous, who need the consolatory hope of a future recompence; he therefore gave himself no concern about it, but finished a life of unparalleled iniquity by unfeeling obstinacy.

Thus have we taken a cursory view of the life of David, who is held up as a standard of saintship, whose conduct in the government of the Jewish nation was the model by which all future princes were to regulate theirs. Those who " walked in the ways of David" were sure of giving satisfaction to the Lord, and to be well pleasing in his sight; others who deviated from so pious an example, were constantly provoking him to anger. If, however, we were to compare the actions of holy David with the Neros and Caligulas of antiquity, we should be necessitated to give the preference to the Jew: if the Lord had not made him a saint, the world would have declared him a monster.

If we be inclined to form an impartial estimate of David's character, we must attend to some circumstances that deserve our notice. Absalom, by his engaging address and attention to the suits of the people, stirred up a most formidable rebellion, and provoked a revolt so general, that David found it necessary to quit his capital. Nothing could be more abhorrent to the feelings of a people, than to see a son rise in rebellion and dethrone his father; his government must therefore have been of the most tyrannic kind that enabled Absalom to find partizans so universally. We are inclined to think the character given him by Shemei to be pretty just. Holy Davids and wise

Solomons may be very good kings for the priesthood, and yet be very bad ones for the people.

It might be deemed unpardonable to bring forward this great Bible hero without proper attendants, we shall therefore select as squire for our holy Quixote, Jehu, king of Israel, who will make a very proper Sancho Pancho to this saint-errant and Nero of the Hebrews. Like him, he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that was in his heart, 2 Kings x. 30. This history of Jehu will also illustrate the Lord's character, and shew his cruelty and injustice better perhaps than any other fact in the Bible. "Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets," and ordered him to go and anoint Jehu, king of Israel, at Ramoth Gilead. This prophet thought it no crime to be guilty of high treason, get the reigning prince and royal family murdered, and place an usurper on the throne, all to revenge the blood of some unknown prophets, of whom we have no account. The young prophet went and executed his commission. The murdering instructions he gave to Jehu were ample: "Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel." Chap. ix. We sometimes hear an apophthegm in the mouths of the righteous, "that we should never do evil that good may come of it;" but what are we to think of the Lord, who stirs up one villain to destroy another, and massacre the innocent, without any good coming out of it?

No sooner was Jehu anointed king by the juvenile prophet, than he and his band of conspirators flew to attack king Jehoram, who was lying ill at Jezreel of his wounds. The king being apprehensive of danger, came out on the road in his chariot, along with Ahaziah king of Judah, to meet Jehu, and know his demands; him Jehu killed with his own hand, and his gang mortally wounded Ahaziah. When he entered

the city, Jezebel, the king's mother, was thrown out of a window, and trod to death by his horses. Then he wrote to the nobles of Samaria, who had the charge of the king's sons, "being seventy persons," them they murdered, and packed up their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jehu, who ordered them to be piled up in two heaps at the entering in of the gate, for the people to view. Having dispatched all the king's sons, "Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab at Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolk, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Chap. x. 11.

Going to Samaria, he met on the way forty-two young princes of Judah, the brethren of Ahaziah, verse 14, who were only his nephews, 2 Chron. xxii. 8, 1. If two inspired writers were to relate a story the same way without contradicting each other, it might then be said that they lied by consent. Them he instantly murdered. When he arrived at Samaria, "he slew all that remained unto Ahab" there. Then under the pretence of a great sacrifice to Baal, he commanded all the adherents of that sect to attend, under pain of death, prophets and priests; and having got the house as full as it could hold, he had them all foully and inhumanly massacred.

Can history afford a parallel to such abominable cruelty? The prescriptions of Sylla and Marius fall infinitely short of it; and the united cruelties of Robespierre, Carrier, and Joseph Le Bon, can never stand a comparison, and yet we are taught to look upon these men as the most abominable ruffians that ever lived. What then must be our astonishment when we hear a God of peace and mercy, approving of such atrocious wickedness? "And the Lord said unto Jehu, because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto all the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."

But although Jehu pleased the Lord by murder and massacre, he cared as little for his worship as any of his predecessors. "Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan." Verse 29, 30. Thus, after all this cruelty and mischief, the Lord was no better served than ever. What becomes of the foreknowledge of God? Could he not select a person to fill the throne that would promote his worship? Or are we to look upon it as a thing impossible to worship a God of such a character? Let us then beware of imitating the conduct of men after "God's own heart;" none ever assume such titles but the most profligate villains and monsters in human shape.

We have now taken a review of the actions of the most eminent men in the Jewish history; what do they present to view but the chiefs of a gang of banditti, totally destitute of virtue or morality, immersed in ignorance and barbarism, and living in a state of the most savage ferocity? Let us, for a moment, compare them with the illustrious men of Greece or Rome, we shall then see the value of Bible morality, and know how far their saints are fit patterns of imitation for civilized Europe.

REMARKS

ON THE

THEOCRACY.

Civil Government necessarily arises out of the nature of society; to judge of its perfection, it is necessary to know its ultimate object, and the end it has in view. The object which the science of government seeks to attain, is, beyond a doubt, "the promoting the greatest possible quantity of happiness to the community." *Salus populi lex*, "or the public welfare, the supreme law," has been a maxim in every nation that ever existed. In proportion, then, as a government is capable of procuring the greatest number of advantages with the fewest inconveniencies, it approaches perfection. That man is a creature of habit, is now known; and that the religion and government under which he lives influence his conduct, and make him contract habits of virtue or vice, is also unquestionable. These two great springs of human action ever have, and ever will, continue to form the manners and character of a nation. The proof of this truth is easy from history: whoever will take the trouble to compare the characters of the ancient Greeks and Romans with that of their modern descendants, will easily perceive the vast difference that is to be found between them to be entirely owing to the different

systems of religion and government under which they respectively lived.

These principles kept in view will enable us to form a judgment of the nature of the Jewish theocracy, if carnal reason be allowed to judge of so divine a government. Of the many various and different forms, for which mankind have contended so earnestly, that surely hath a fair claim for preference, in which the Author of our being condescends to become our lawgiver and magistrate. If there do exist a Being, destitute of human passions, and possessed of infinite justice, wisdom, and power, it were to be wished he would take upon him the charge of governing the whole human race. I am sure their affairs have been sadly managed by those who have governed them hitherto. I know it is the opinion of philosophers, that no government ever existed, or can exist, but of men: priests have affirmed, that a theocracy may exist, if they are to be its administrators; and that the Jewish government was one. To save all altercation on this head, we shall allow it to be as they say: all we mean to do is only to examine the nature of it, and see what sort of government it was.

It would not be using the Lord with the respect due to so great a personage, to place him at the head of their affairs, while they were slaves to Pharaoh. The commencement of the theocracy must therefore be fixed at the time the Israelites left Egypt; when the Lord brought them up by "mighty wonders and a strong hand." The Israelites had at this time six hundred thousand fighting men. Had these fellows been animated with the spirit of liberty, they could easily have cut their way out of Egypt, without putting the Lord to the expence of "mighty wonders:" but a mob of poltrons needed to be animated with the miracle of the ten plagues. Scoffers have made themselves very merry with these ten plagues; they observe, if they were no better performed than is related, they must have been below the performances of Boaz or

Breslaw.[1] They take notice, that if Moses had turned all the water into blood, as is affirmed, the magicians could not have done so likewise, as they had no water left to be turned into blood. They affect to pity the fate of the Egyptian cattle, who were all killed by a murrain, then smitten with blains; killed a second time by a storm of hail; a third time at the death of the first-born; and, lastly, they were drowned in the Red sea. This was too severe treatment of the poor beasts. But we will retail no more of the cavils of these scoffers, who would never have done, if they were indulged.

The Lord having got his people fairly out of Egypt, conducted them into that best of all possible countries, the deserts of Arabia, where they wandered about forty years in great want of water, bread, food for their cattle, and most of the articles of the first necessity. The distresses and hardships they suffered in the wilderness were the cause of many discontents and murmurs breaking out amongst them. Instead of the Lord foreseeing their wants, and providing for their relief, their murmurings only provoked him to anger, and put him in a rage. Instead of enlightening their understandings, or making them comprehend the nature of their situation, they are wholly actuated by a blind force, which disjoints and deranges every spring of human action. With them miracles and prodigies are more common than ordinary events. In such a situation, men cannot regulate their conduct by the known relation between cause and effect; for that is entirely destroyed; the influence of motives is wholly done away, and men in such circumstances are nothing more than passive instruments in the hand that guides them. If the Lord be "an infinitely wise being," (as the church declares him to be) that has made every thing very good, in the best possible manner, and

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[1] Two famous slight-of-hand performers.

can afterwards infringe his own law, and work a miracle, then there can be no occasion for rewards and punishments; the one would no longer deter from vice, nor the other incite to virtue.

When the Lord wrought so many miracles on the inanimate objects that surrounded his chosen people, it would have been proper to have performed another on their understandings, and so have suited their minds to their circumstances, and made one grand miracle of the whole. Not being able to do this, we find him having recourse to violence, to tyranny, and to massacre. The cruel excesses of tyrants have produced the most revolting sensations in every human breast, but the most enormous that ever was heard of in any other country under heaven, comes infinitely short of the following atrocious order: "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me; and all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate, throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." Exod. xxxii. 26. That is, the priests, who were the most criminal in this affair of the golden calf, were to commit an indiscriminate butchery, without respect to who were innocent or guilty, violating every bond of natural and social affection.

This is not the only massacre that has been committed by those who have ranged themselves on the Lord's side, or pretended his orders; three hundred millions of human beings have been sacrificed by Christian priests upon similar pretexts. Whenever the Lord calls to bloodshed, the priests are, to a man, on his side, "For as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent;" Hos. vi. 9. If they are too cowardly to draw

the sword, they do not fail to sound the tocsin of war. But doth the voice of humanity call? Doth the voice of indigence call? Doth the melting voice of charity call? Or doth the voice of the oppressed call? They are as the adder, deaf.

From that confused mass of disjointed scraps, which some people affect to call the Mosaic code, we shall select for examination a few of those laws or regulations, the influence of which seem to have reached modern times. It appears by Lev. xxvii. 29, that "none devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death," was a law that authorised the abominable custom of human sacrifices, and which the priests of Christianity have been so loud in condemning heathenism for countenancing. The law which says, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," Exod. xxii. 18, "and a wizard shall surely be put to death," Lev. xx. 27, were the occasion of unbounded enormities. Our barbarous ancestors, ignorant of Nature and her operations, struck with any uncommon appearance, or afflicted with any unusual disease, rather than be at the trouble of investigating the cause, chose rather to refer it to witchcraft, and the operations of wizards, because there were laws in the Bible that condemned witches and wizards. Millions of people have been sacrificed to this abominable frenzy, while it reigned in Europe; numberless helpless and infirm wretches were convicted of witchcraft, upon the testimony of their own infirmities, and burnt alive for committing impossibilities according to the divine law of Exodus. But now that the law is repealed, there are no witches to be found; and when women can bewitch with impunity they will not bewitch at all. That law, by which a woman, suspected of incontinence, was obliged to drink a certain quantity of consecrated water, Num. v. 11, has now fallen into disuse; unhappily, our modern priests have lost the secret of manufacturing it. But while barbarity and ignorance reigned in Europe, our

ancestors, who mistook dreams for realities, and these wild inconsistencies for the laws of God, built upon this chapter that system of Gothic jurisprudence which was then called the trial by God's judgment;[1] they thought that because the Jews pretended to discover adultery by means of consecrated water, they could discover other crimes by similar means. Hence the institution of the judicial combat, trial by cold or hot water, or red-hot iron,[2] which for a long period

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[1] In doubtful cases two men were chosen, and led in great ceremony to a church. Here they stood upright, with their arms extended in the figure of a cross, and in the mean time divine service was celebrated. That party, whose champion kept his posture the longest, was declared to have gained the cause.

[2] A way of clearing one's innocence in those ancient times, was to handle a piece of iron, heated more or less, according to the violence of the suspicion. It was consecrated, and carefully kept in some churches; for all had not this privilege, which was no less profitable than honourable. This piece of iron was either a gauntlet, in which the party accused was to thrust his hand, or a bar, which he was to take up two or three times. His hand was then wrapped up in a bag, on which the judge and the adversary put their seals, not taking them off till three days after. If there were no marks of a burn, he was acquitted; but any remaining impression of the fire was a proof of guilt. This was the trial of the nobles, priests, and gentry. That of the commonalty was by plunging the hand into boiling water; or by throwing the party into a large vessel of water, with his hands and feet tied. These ceremonies were preceded by a form of prayers. If he floated, he was concluded guilty; if he sunk, he was declared innocent. It was the persuasion, at that time, that God would work a miracle sooner than innocence should suffer; a notion equally superstitious and absurd, but withal so strong, that it ever proved one of the great obstacles towards the abolishment of customs so contrary to reason. Accordingly, it was not till the thirteenth century that they were suppressed; and then by a solemn decree of the Council of Lateran, under the pontificate of Innocent III.

It may, perhaps, be asked, What is to be thought of these trials, and the miracles with which they are said to have been attended? Was all which is related on this head really supernatural, or the doings of artifice and ignorance? These miraculous facts are so generally agreed on by all historians, that to deny them, seems, in a great measure, overthrowing all the foundations of history: but can credit be given to them, without overthrowing all the principles of reason? I shall answer this no less important than curious question,

continued to disgrace the code of every European nation, and to be a monument to future ages of the folly and mischief of attending to the reveries of superstition, and neglecting the dictates of reason and common sense.

The slave trade is a commerce universally odious; every human heart but those immediately concerned in the traffic revolts at the very idea of it; enlightened Europe hath sufficiently execrated it already for us to say any thing of it here. We only mean to observe, that when the feelings and humanity of the nation with one voice demanded its unqualified abolition, the few sordid avaricious supporters of the system had little to oppose to the justice and equity of the claim but the law of Leviticus, chap. xxv. 44, 46, "Both thy bondmen and bondmaids, which thou shalt have of the heathen that are round about you, of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you; which they begat in your land, and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them for an inheritance to your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever." Thus may justice, humanity, and charity,

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from the Memoirs of the Academy des Belles Lettres. It is first observed, that trials have never been solemnly approved by the church; that among the great number of those who relate these supposed miracles, some deserve very little regard, others do not relate them as certain facts, but as the history of vulgar belief; lastly, that in those very ages when this superstition had received the sanction of the laws, it met with opposers, who openly refused to submit to it; and the second Council of Aix-la-Chapelle calls them artifices tending to confound truth and falsity. "George Logothetes speaks of a person, who, in the thirteenth century, refused to stand a fiery trial, saying, that he was no mountebank. The archbishop beginning to urge him to a compliance, he made answer, that he would take the red-hot iron into his hands, if his Grace would give it him in his. The prelate, who was too knowing to comply with the proposal, allowed that it was not proper to tempt God."—Abbot Velly.

plead in vain for the abolition of this system of iniquity; the interested will always quote the law of Leviticus in their favour, and with those who prefer the pretended revelations of a horde of savages to the laws of reason and justice, it will ever be a powerful argument.

Not only doth the Lord authorise the slave trade, but himself became a "dealer in human flesh," and treated his own chosen people in the same way as the Negro princes on the coast of Africa do theirs. For, "he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years," Judges iii. 8. Also "the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; he mightily oppressed the children of Israel," chap. iv. 2, 3. He likewise "sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. They vexed and oppressed the children of Israel eighteen years," chap. x. 7, 8. If he sold them, he also "delivered them into the hand of Midian, seven years," chap. vi. 1, "and into the hand of the Philistines forty years," chap. xiii. 1. These sellings and deliverings doth not say a great deal in favour of the supreme magistrate of a theocratical government. The Psalmist, however, insinuates, that the Lord made but an indifferent merchant; he says, "Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price," Psalm xliv. 12. Our slave-dealers can tell a different story.

If the civil policy of the Jews was bad, their ecclesiastical was much worse. The Lord, it seems, thought proper to give unto Aaron and the priesthood, "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat; the first fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine." Numb. xviii. 12, 13. They were also to have, "the first

fruit of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thy oil; and the first of the fleece of thy sheep shalt thou give him," Deut. xviii. 21. The Levites, although only the twelfth part of the nation, were to have the tenth part of the property, Numb. xviii. 21. These munificent grants encouraged the priesthood to lay claim to every thing that was good or valuable in the country; to such a height had priestly despotism arrived in the days of Eli, "that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priests servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a flesh hook of three teeth in his hand, and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or cauldron, or pot; all that the flesh hook brought up, the priest took for himself: so they did in Shiloh, unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, give flesh to roast for the priest, for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him; nay, but thou shalt give it me now; and if not, I will take it by force." This was true priestly conduct; their scandalous debauchery was of a piece with it: for the sons of Eli "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation," 1 Sam. i. 13, 22. These pious excesses have always stuck to the holy fraternity, and are equally found in the Levite of Judea, as the Druid of Gaul.

It is to be observed that all revelations from heaven have ever come to mankind through the medium of the priesthood; they have therefore taken good care that the gods should always order them ease and plenty; "they are the lilies of the valley, they toil not, neither do they spin." If the Lord were to order the people to give his priests nothing but poor fare and hard labour, they would all instantly desert the service. Nay, I even question if "angels' food" would please the priests of our day, although they are un-

doubtedly very heavenly-minded, and seek not to lay up their treasure in earthen vessels, " where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ;" yet if the carnal comforts of this life can be obtained in a religious way, they will not fail to strain every nerve to obtain them. It is likely that the Lord, seeing such mischievous effects flowing from such extravagant donations, grew ashamed of them ; and that " these were the statutes he gave his people, that were not good, and the judgments whereby they should not live," Ezek. xx. 25. Such, at least, is the opinion of St. Peter, who says, " they were a yoke, which neither their fathers nor them were able to bear," Acts xv. 10. The apostle Paul is of the same mind. See Galat. v. 1.

If we reflect ever so little on the nature of Judaism, we must soon be convinced that it could only be supported by the most intolerable oppression ; a twelfth part of the nation priests, and doing nothing : one third of their time employed in religious ceremonies, together with the expence of sacrifices and offerings, must always have proved a millstone about the neck of industry, and concentrate the whole wealth of the country into the hands of the priests.

This divine government of a theocracy does not appear to have been " the best of all possible governments," or " the wonder and envy of surrounding nations." If we consult the book of Judges, we find the people subject to every calamity incident to a bad system. Surrounded by rapacious neighbours, they were liable to continual invasions from without ; want of system and order made them a prey to innumerable broils and commotions at home. Sometimes " the Lord raised them up Judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hands of their enemies all the days of the judge." These deliverings were but temporary relief, mere patch-work expedients, ill calculated to produce any lasting benefit ; for the people became anarchists, " every man

doing that which was right in his own eyes." Jud. xvi. 6; xxi. 25. So that in fact this divine government was none at all. By degrees the priesthood got all the power into their own hands, and their abuse of it was the cause of great discontents. The venality and extortion of Samuel's sons, "who turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment, provoked a revolution, when the people rejected the Lord, that he should not reign over them, and they chose them a king after the manner of the nations," 1 Sam. vii. 8. Thus ended the theocracy, which the priests of modern times are not ashamed of holding up as a system of divine perfection; but, upon examination, we have found to be a series of intolerable abuses and wild anarchy.

Happy the people who have it in their power to erect a system of government upon the immutable basis of equal rights; where men's interest and their duty are happily united; where equal laws, cherishing genius and industry, contribute to spread plenty, peace, and happiness over the whole country!

CONCLUSION.

We have now taken a general survey of the character of the Deity, from the sacred books of the Jews; books which his votaries pretend were inspired and dictated by the God himself. But have we found a God of holiness, truth, justice, goodness? Far, very far from it. These books represent their God, as a being of ferocious cruelty, tyrannical, unjust, false, deceitful, passionate, angry, revengeful, and capricious, continually repenting and changing his mind. True, indeed, they also say that he is good, merciful, and just, slow to anger, and of great kindness, one whose tender mercies are above all his other works; in short they blow hot and cold alternately, and give him such discordant qualities, that no such being ever did or can exist, but in the distempered imagination of gloomy superstition, and blind credulity.

The priesthood have also fathered upon him those incoherent rhapsodies, which they declare to the ignorant to be the fountain of divine wisdom, but which we look upon to be the storehouse of priestly fraud; a compilation so confused, and contradictory, as to bid defiance to all the rules of criticism. A book which no human intellect has ever been able to explain or illustrate; although millions of men have been constantly employed for many ages in clearing it up, it still continues as dark as ever, and the same infallible rule of faith and manners it always was. We however offer one observation which may make several passages easily understood, that according to the present reading are wholly unintelligible. In almost every case where they now read the words Lord and God, substitute the word Priest, which will make that sense

which now appears nonsense, and will throw such light on the subject that none can be ignorant of the true meaning.

Is it not blasphemy and impiety to insult a God whom we pretend to believe in, to call him good, and make him a tyrant? Is it not the height of impiety to deceive a man in the name of a God of truth, and make him the author of lies? Can we say that a God who is supremely happy and omnipotent, is offended by his feeble creatures? And is it not both impious and irrational at the same time, to make a mere chimera of the God we adore? The judicious reflection of Plutarch, in his essay on superstition, is extremely applicable to the case before us. He says, "that he had rather that men should say there never was such a man as Plutarch, than that they should say Plutarch was cruel, a liar, and unjust. Better to have no God at all, than to represent him such as the poets feign of Saturn, first to beget children, and then eat them." And surely much better would it be for the human race to be governed by the laws of nature and reason, than to be guided by the imaginary laws of a fantastical chimera, made up of every species of human wickedness and folly, such as he is represented to us by the Jews. He prefers atheism to superstition, and surely it must be the worst kind of it that represents God to us as a monster of wickedness. He says, "Atheism brings men to an unconcernedness and indifference of temper: for the design of those who deny a God, is to ease themselves of his fear. But superstition appears by its name to be a distempered opinion and conceit, productive of such mean and abject apprehensions, as debase and break a man's spirit. For though he thinks justly that there are divine powers, yet so erroneous is his judgment, that he thinks they are sour and vindictive beings. Atheism is only false reasoning, while superstition is not only false reasoning, but superadds a passion, fear, which is destitute both of courage and reason, and renders us

stupid, distracted, and inactive. But of all fears none confounds a man like religious fear."

My Lord Bacon is of the same opinion; he says, "Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not: but superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men. Therefore, Atheism did never perturb states; for it maketh men wary of themselves, as looking no further; and we see the times inclined to Atheism (as the times of Augustus Cæsar) were civil times. But superstition hath been the confusion of many states; and bringeth in a new *primum mobile*, that ravisheth all the spheres of government."

Indeed, nothing can be more clear than that a wicked God must have wicked votaries; the commission of crimes is the only worship fitted for such a being; to imitate him must be to plunge into every kind of enormity. This is exactly the case with those who are called his saints. Cunning, fraud, deceit, injustice, inhumanity, and cruelty, are the great outlines that mark the characters of the Lord's saints. No other nation ever produced men equally criminal and wicked; the heroes and saints of Judaism are monsters in nature, and such will ever be the consequence of neglecting the dictates of experience and reason, to follow the mad chimeras of deceitful impostors.

If a people can be so grossly infatuated as to believe themselves under the immediate government of an unknown invisible Being, they are capable of being imposed on and made to believe the most glaring impostures. They will stick at no crimes, however enormous, be restrained by no compunctions of humanity; the bonds of justice become too feeble to restrain their vicious propensities, whenever the pretended vicegerents of heaven instigate them to the commission of crimes. Thus the Jews, who thought themselves exclusively favoured with a revelation from God, have

been a nation detested for wickedness and barbarism by all people of the earth. Let us then spurn this pretended gift of heaven, which has proved so inimical to human happiness; let us return back to the celestial regions, and betake ourselves to the morality of the earth. To think of building a system of morality on the basis of revelation, is attempting to found a castle in a quagmire, the foundations of which will be for ever slipping from under it. It is on the nature of man and his various relations in society only, that it can stand, but which is sufficiently able to support it. Let us then discard the reveries of imposture, and listen to the dictates of nature; let us turn a deaf ear to visions, dreams, and revelations; but be ever attentive to the voice of truth, sober reason, and experience. Let us see if the superstition of the earth hath any thing better to present to our view than the following little abstract, from a work of distinguished merit, which we shall submit to the judgment of our readers, and so bid them farewell.

Be just, because equity is the support of the human species. Be good, because goodness connects all hearts. Be indulgent, because feeble thyself, thou livest with beings as feeble as thou art. Be gentle, because gentleness attracts affection. Be grateful, because gratitude feeds and nourishes benevolence. Be modest, because haughtiness is disgusting to beings smitten with themselves. Forgive injuries, because revenge perpetuates hatred. Do good to him that injureth thee, in order to shew thyself more noble than he is, and to make a friend of him. Be reserved, temperate, and chaste, because voluptuousness, intemperance, and excess, will destroy thy being, and render thee contemptible.

Be a citizen, because thy country is necessary to thy security, to thy pleasures, and to thine happiness. Be faithful, and submit to legitimate authority, because it is requisite to the maintenance of that society which is necessary to thyself. Be obedient to the laws;

because they are the expression of the public will, to which thy particular will ought to be subordinate. Defend thy country, because it is that which renders thee happy, and contains thy property, as well as all those beings who are dearest to thine heart. Do not permit this common parent of thyself, and thy fellow citizens, to fall under the shackles of tyranny, because from thence it will be no more than a prison to thee. If thine unjust country refuse thee happiness; if, submitted to an unjust power, it suffers thee to be oppressed, withdraw thyself from it in silence, and never disturb it. In short, be a man: be a sensible and rational being; be a faithful husband; a tender father; an equitable master; a zealous citizen: labour to serve thy country by thy powers, thy talents, thine industry, and thy virtues; participate with thine associates those gifts which nature hath bestowed on thee; diffuse happiness, contentment, and joy, over all those who approach thee; that the sphere of thine actions, enlivened by thy kindness, may react upon thyself. Be assured, that the man who makes others happy, cannot be unhappy himself.

If experience direct our steps, truth illuminate our way, and reason support us with its aid, we shall infallibly arrive at that happiness our circumstances will permit, and our natures are capable of enjoying, without having recourse to the mandates of invisible phantoms, or their inferior agents.

THE END.